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Painting a Modern India: F.N. Souza, M.F. Husain, & Artistic Identity After Independence

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Painting a Modern India: F.N. Souza, M.F. Husain, & Artistic Identity After
Independence

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by
Shay Kothari

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Introduction

Author's Note, March 7th, 2020

Around this time last year, I had no idea what I wanted to write my senior project on. I thought of all the topics I'd learned in my studies, artist's books that I'd read, favorite artworks I'd gazed at in museums, nothing clicked. Then, my girlfriend, Bailey, attended a talk at her school with a contemporary Indian artist named Chitra Ganesh. In her talk she mentioned M. F. Husain and the Bombay Progressive Artists Group, and Bailey asked if I was familiar with them. Then it clicked. Before my first birthday, my mother and I were invited to a toddler's birthday party by my parent's friend of a friend. The family lived in Westchester and were friends of the artist M. F. Husain, who often stayed with them when he visited the United States. As a party favor, Husain would be there making drawings for the children. My parents originally had no intention of taking me to the party, but my father convinced my mother to take me because Husain would be there. On a small piece of paper, he drew a swan with two chicks, signed it "Husain 7 VI '98" on the bottom right, and signed my name horribly wrong, "Schey" on the top left (fig. 1). The drawing was kept in an album of baby photos for almost 20 years until I got it framed that summer. It now hangs above the table where I write. This January while in Mumbai, I told my Grandmother about my project. She told me that many years ago she was having lunch at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, where she saw M. F. Husain and asked him for an autograph. She ran to her room and showed me the autograph, which she had also gotten framed (fig. 2). Her name is written in the top left corner, and his signature reads "Husain 6 XII '97". She met him only six months before me!

A Brief History of Art in Colonial India

India became an independent nation on August 15th, 1947, and modern Indian art after independence began as a rejection of popular Indian art styles during the colonial era. Two early proponents of modern Indian painting and founding members of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group, Francis Newton Souza (1924-2002) and Maqbool Fida Husain (1915-2011) both attended the Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay, one of the most prestigious art schools in the country. Though neither of them finished their education there, the style of art that came out of the school served as an authority of Indian art for many years. Understanding the traditions of art that came out of British era schools such as the J. J. and the subsequent rejections of such traditions during the colonial period are vital to interpreting the significance of modern art in the immediate post-colonial era. The Sir J. J. School of Art was founded in 1857, and in that same year, the directors of the school wrote a report on the status of Indian art, writing,

The grotesque images with the shapes of men and animals in all parts of the Hindu temple are unredeemably bad. Their sculpted foliage is purely abstract in nature. It seems that the safest way of attempting to regenerate this defective and artificial manner of design without destroying what it has inherited from European Schools of Art is to set these students to copy faithfully the objects of nature, men and women, the beast, vegetation, the mountains that surrounds him and to leave him to digest the knowledge thus acquired.¹

British imperialism had been long established in India by this time, and the art schools set up during the mid 19th century closely followed the programs of art schools in Great Britain where a hierarchical system placed the most importance on academic realism.² The school was named

¹ *The Sir J. J. School of Art Report*, Bombay, 1857, quoted in Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

² Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

after Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (1783-1859), a wealthy merchant and art enthusiast who pledged 100,000 rupees to help establish an art school in Bombay. While the school was put up with Indian money, it was run by Englishmen. There is an obvious lack of appreciation for the rich history and tradition of Indian art in the school's report. The descriptions of religious iconography as grotesque and bad are signs of flagrant ignorance, and according to the author, the only redeemable qualities of Indian art are the elements that have been borrowed from European traditions. It was in this mindset that one of the subcontinent's most important and recognized art institutions was founded.

Orientalist painter John Griffiths became the principal of the school and was in charge of the painting department. He is perhaps most remembered for leading a team of students to copy the recently rediscovered paintings at the Ajanta caves from 1872 to 1884. The Ajanta caves were built between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE, and are home to some of the oldest religious paintings in the world. As made clear in the school's report from 1857, the school denounced Indian art, but led the exhibition to copy the Ajanta cave paintings for their historical and ethnographic value. As Griffiths had to spend the majority of his time at the school, most of the copying was done under the supervision of one of his students, Pestonji Bomanji (1851-1938). When the paintings were completed, Griffiths pronounced, "I am persuaded that no European, no matter how skillful, could have so completely caught the spirit of the originals."³ Bomanji came from a relatively wealthy family, like many other artists studying at the J.J. School of Art, because the students were expected to buy their own art materials. He was well trained in academic realism, and his Dutch influence led him to be dubbed the "Indian

³ Ibid., 7.

Rembrandt.”⁴ Bomanji’s self portrait from 1914 (fig. 3), painted when he was 64 years old, certainly recalls Rembrandt’s self portraits from the later portion of his life. After he finished his schooling, Bomanji became a relatively successful portraitist, and in 1894, he became one of the first Indian teachers at the J.J. School of Art, and a few years later, the school’s first Indian vice principal.⁵

India’s most revered academic painter was Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906). Varma had little formal training, but as he was a member of the royal family of Travancore (in present-day Kerala), he learned by watching European painters at the court.⁶ He was one of the earliest Indian painters to paint in the western tradition, but rather than painting European scenes, he instilled a national identity into his work, painting Indian people and scenes from Hindu epics. *Radha in the Moonlight*, 1890 (fig. 4), is one of Varma’s most beautiful renditions of a mythological figure. Radha, Lord Krishna’s consort, sits upon a rock with a *pooja thali*, a plate of flowers and sweets used in worship. She is dressed beautifully and adheres to Indian beauty standards by having fair skin and large eyes. His naturalistic depictions were immensely popular, and Varma became nothing short of a celebrity, with inexpensive reproductions of his paintings found in millions of Indian homes.⁷ He visited Bombay and the J.J. School of Art, where students begged him to demonstrate his painting abilities for them, but Varma held contempt for the school’s principal, John Griffiths, writing, “On a big easel was his chef d’oeuvre, *The Temple Steps*, in a beautifully carved blackwood frame, a painting on which he had bestowed much labour and time... It was poor in colour, poor in execution, and poor in design. We have seen a

⁴ “Self Portrait, Pestonji Bomanji,” *The Fine and Decorative Arts Sale, August 26, 2014*, Pundole’s.

⁵ Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 82.

⁶ Partha Mitter, *Indian Art*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford University Press, 2001), 176.

⁷ Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, 18.

similar subject handled in a more masterly way by Mr Van Ruith.”⁸ Being the principal of one of India’s most important art schools, Griffiths played a very big role in India’s art world. He taught many aspiring artists who worshipped Ravi Varma, so for Varma to hold such disdain for Griffith’s art was a big blow.

Today Varma is still widely recognized as one of India’s most important artists, and an Indian postal stamp was made to commemorate the 65th anniversary of his death. But in the years leading up to his death, Varma’s works were denounced by a group of artists in Bengal who would become the Bengal School.⁹ They accused his work of being hybrid and condemned his European influence. In Kobena Mercer’s conversation with Partha Mitter in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, Mitter explains the dichotomy between Varma’s paintings and the new Bengal School, writing,

Varma’s history paintings were the first to imagine the nation’s past. And yet when the next generation of nationalists, the Bengal School painters constructed their cultural identity, they rejected Varma’s brand of naturalism, which they saw as a slavish imitation, ingrained in the colonial psyche and the Victorian taste of colonial India, and that’s when they began to try to ‘recover’ pre-colonial art.¹⁰

In the early 20th century, a new kind of Indian nationalist art came into fruition, one that claimed to be free of European influences and a revival of traditional forms of Indian art, emphasising India’s spiritual essence.¹¹ This movement was led by Abanindranath Tagore, nephew of the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mitter, *Indian Art*, 177.

¹⁰ Partha Mitter, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, Annotating Art’s Histories Series (Institute of International Visual Arts, 2005), 31-33.

¹¹ Dalmia, 25.

great poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore and his followers did not wish to imitate any western traditions, but to look solely at pre-colonial Indian art.

Tagore painted *The Passing of Shah Jahan* (fig. 5) in 1902, a celebration of one of India's most revered Mughal rulers. The painting depicts the aged Shah Jahan on his deathbed, accompanied by one of his daughters. Shah Jahan is widely remembered for commissioning many of India's most marvelous architectural wonders, including the Taj Mahal, which was built as a resting ground for his favorite wife Mumtaz Mahal. Towards the end of his life, one of his sons confined him to house arrest in Agra Fort, and legend has it that he spent much of his time gazing at the Taj Mahal from his room, mourning his lost love. In Tagore's depiction of his final moments, Shah Jahan's gaze is directed towards the Taj Mahal, away from his daughter and the viewer. Tagore chooses to make both figures in the painting quite small, emphasising the marble columns and inlay work found in Mughal architecture. The style of *The Passing of Shah Jahan* is clearly influenced by ancient Indian tradition of miniature paintings. Miniature paintings are traditionally made with very bright colors, but the subdued tones of Tagore's work came from his meeting with Japanese art critic Kakuzo Okakura Tenshin, who introduced Tagore to the smoky, washed colors of Japanese painting. The subdued colors better highlight the mood of the painting, one of death and mourning, than the bright tones of traditional Indian miniatures..

Abanindranath Tagore's most iconic work, *Bharat Mata*, 1905 (fig. 6), was painted shortly after the partition of Bengal by the British Raj in October 1905.¹² Tagore's painting of *Bharat Mata*, meaning "Mother India," was a political act meant to personify India. The woman is dressed in a saffron dress, one of India's national colors. She has four arms like a Hindu deity,

¹² Mitter, *Indian Art*, 179.

but rather than holding religious or mythologically symbolic objects as Hindu deities do, Mother India holds objects that Tagore believed to be nationalist emblems, important to all Indians; cloth to symbolize clothing, a beaded mala to represent religious knowledge, paper to represent secular knowledge, and wheat to represent food.¹³ Tagore's sister, Sunayani Devi (1875-1962) (fig. 7), was another important member of the Bengal School and the first female Indian artist to be publicly recognized, showing in a 1922 exhibition in Calcutta alongside Kandinsky, Klee, and other Bauhaus artists.¹⁴ By the 1920s she and other aristocratic Bengali artists found a growing fascination for village life, and she is credited as the first modern Indian artist to be a major proponent of and take influence from folk art.¹⁵ Although belonging to a very wealthy family, she was never properly trained in the arts, which may have worked out in her favor as critics praised her simplistic style and compared her to contemporary primitivists.¹⁶

Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941) was one of modern India's most important painters. She was born in Budapest to a Sikh father and Hungarian-Jewish mother. She came from a wealthy family and had lots of training in the arts, studying in Florence and Paris. In Paris, she painted her famous *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934 (fig. 8). The sexualized tone of the portrait places herself in the primitivist mode of exotic sexuality found in the works of Paul Gauguin, but unlike the works of primitivists and orientalist, in Sher-Gil's portrait, she is both the author and the subject, playing with the concerns of the colonialist gaze, yet still owning her own image.

Wishing to connect with her roots, she moved to India after finishing her studies in Paris in 1934,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Partha Mitter, *Sunayani Devi* (Oxford University Press, 2006), <https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7002021599>.

¹⁵ "Untitled (Krishna), Sunayani Devi," *South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art, Christies*, June 12, 2018.

¹⁶ Ibid.

writing, “I can only paint in India. Europe belongs to Picasso, Matisse, Braque.... India belongs only to me.”¹⁷ Influenced by the works of Paul Gauguin, she looked at India as a primitivist did, romanticizing the poverty, sadness, and hardships of the village people she saw around her. In *Contemporary Indian Artists*, art historian Geeta Kapur writes, “[Amrita Sher-Gil] lent the villagers her own romantic consciousness, her own melancholy, as a token, perhaps, of her sympathy with them. She made her Indians beautifully dark and emaciated; she showed them immobile, brooding over an everlasting dream.”¹⁸ Sher-Gil was emotionally distraught for much of her time in India, caught between her family’s financial difficulties and personal relations, and these struggles were reflected in the qualities of the subjects she painted.

Sher-Gil was undeniably nationalist in nature, taking influence from both Rabindranath and Abanindranth Tagore, and following the Bengal School’s pursuit of a pure national style of art. She wrote, “I am an individualist, evolving a new technique, which, though not necessarily Indian in the traditional sense of the word, will yet be fundamentally Indian in spirit. With the eternal significance of form and colour I interpret India and, principally, the life of the poor on the plane that transcends the plane of mere sentimental interest.”¹⁹ She was excited by the colors and sights in India and chose to mix these vibrant tones with the hardships she saw in the faces of the people. Her first painting made in India, *Three Girls*, 1935 (fig. 9), depicts three women in colorful garb. Each of the three women looks down and to the left of the viewer, with intense sadness and uncertainty in their eyes. The woman on the right in red has her hands on her lap, her right hand holds her right knee, while her left hand rests on the same leg but with palm facing up. The unnatural positioning of the hands relays a feeling of nervousness. *Boys with Lemons*,

¹⁷ J. N. Sinha, “Amrita’s Village,” *Frontline*, March 8, 2013.

¹⁸ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists* (Vikas, 1978), 127.

¹⁹ Dalmia, *Making of Modern Indian Art*, 30-31.

1935 (fig. 10), was painted the same year. Again the two boys look away from the viewer, with melancholic expressions. One boy sits with a pink flower in his ear, holding a pair of lemons, while the other boy stands shirtless and holds a vessel upon his head. Her life was tragically cut short, dying of an unknown illness at the age of 29. Despite her short life, she was incredibly prolific and her work inspired generations of Indian artists.

Along with Abanindranath Tagore and Amrita Sher-Gil, the third most important figure in pre-independent Indian art was Jamini Roy (1887-1974). Following Sunayani Devi and other Bengali nationalists, Jamini Roy looked to rural folk art in his search for national expression. He noticed that most traditional Indian art was created anonymously, and condemned artistic individualism as it was a product of the colonial era, even refusing to sign his own paintings. He gave up the use of oil paints because he believed that true Indian art could not be created with foreign pigments or materials.²⁰ Though he renounced individualism, he developed a style that was uniquely his. His paintings are recognized for their bold simplicity, using thick lines and vibrant colors. He pays little attention to the individualistic features of his subjects and takes many elements from pre-colonial traditions of Indian art. In *A Woman*, c. 1940s (fig. 11), Roy emphasizes the almond-shaped eyes of Northern Indian miniature paintings, and only highlights the essential features to make his subject appear Indian; the jewelry, the bindi, and the clothing. He continued this style for much of his life, as seen in *Mother and Child*, c. 1960s (fig. 12). Both Roy and Sher-Gil's decisions to look at folk art traditions and paint village people provided a great deal of inspiration for members of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group and later Indian modernists.

²⁰ Mitter, *Indian Art*, 196.

Partition & Aftermath

The partition of India and Pakistan took place incredibly quickly and affected the lives of millions of people. The first formal desire by the Muslim League for an independent nation for Muslims of the subcontinent was articulated in 1940, only seven years before partition took place, and the official borders that would separate India and Pakistan were not made clear until two days after they had become independent nations.²¹ While Pakistan would become a nation for Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, the two most prominent figures in India's struggle for independence, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, strongly advocated Hindu-Muslim unity and proclaimed that India be a secular nation.

In June 1947, the British government appointed Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer who had never been east of Paris, to partition British India.²² He and his small team were given five weeks to draw the line which would divide the country, relying on outdated maps and inaccurate census figures. Leaders and members of congress in India had believed that they would have at least another year before the British formally left India, which would provide leaders with enough time to plan a proper partition, but the British wished to expedite the process.²³ The "Radcliffe Line" split Northwestern India between India and Pakistan and the Northeastern state of Bengal between India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The rushed partition had catastrophic effects. The line went straight through communities that had been living side by side for centuries and left important holy sites on the wrong side of the line. 14 million people were displaced, and roughly one million were killed and millions of others were injured due to ensuing

²¹ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Contemporary South Asia (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

²² Ricardo Pollack, *Partition: The Day India Burned* (BBC, 2007).

²³ Pandey, 40.

religious violence. Radcliffe recognized that he was unfit for such a responsibility, and after seeing the results of his partition, he refused his payment for his work and burned all of his papers and notes. He never returned to India or Pakistan again, saying, “There will be roughly 80 million people with a grievance looking for me, I do not want them to find me.”²⁴

Much uncertainty and confusion surrounded the partition, with both Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, and Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, opposing any violence and immediate large-scale migrations of populations to either side.²⁵ But the violence continued, and after partition took place, Jinnah even conveyed that he hoped that “officials of the opposite community would at a later stage come back and serve in their provinces.”²⁶ As the whole subcontinent was incredibly unprepared for such an event, many leaders were unsure if partition would be a permanent endeavor.²⁷ Jinnah kept his house in Bombay while serving as the Governor-General of Pakistan, and his daughter chose to remain in India. Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism played large parts in the violence that ensued during and after the partition era, but Gandhi and Nehru gave birth to an Indian nationalist movement, which included members of all religions present in the subcontinent. Many millions of Muslim Indians living outside the regions designated for Pakistan had to make an incredibly tough decision, whether to leave the life they had been familiar with their whole lives, or join the Indian nationalist movement. The members of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group adhered to these Indian nationalist beliefs; the two founding Muslim members M. F. Husain and Sayed Haider Raza

²⁴ Martin Rubin, “Passion and Partition,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 2007.

²⁵ Pandey, 41.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ A conversation between Sanjib Baruah and the author, March 2020.

(1922-2016) believed that there was promise in the newly independent India and opted to stay, even as all of Raza's family moved to Pakistan.

The Bombay Progressive Artists Group

The Progressive Artists Group was founded on the eve of Indian independence in 1947. The three original members were Francis Newton Souza, Sayed Haider Raza, and Krishnaji Howlaji Ara (1914-1985). Each member nominated one more member so that the group would become six, and thus joined Maqbool Fida Husain, Sadanand Bakre (1920-2007), and Hari Ambadas Gade (1917-2001) (fig. 13). Though the six members came from different religious and economic backgrounds and utilized different artistic styles, they were all Indian, believed in a secular India, and loathed the academic realism taught at the J. J. School of Art where Souza, Raza, Husain, and Ara attended and were against the revivalist art of the Bengal School. In a newspaper article from the late 1940s, critic Jag Mohan described the group, "it is not a school in the sense of which other schools of painting are known. Each member has his own technique and the only 'ism' that the members have in common is their individualism."²⁸ Souza had formed an alliance with the Communist Party of India, and their early meetings took place at their headquarters, though their relationship with the party did not last long.

The initial Progressive Artists Group exhibitions were met with much criticism, and their art was described as 'degrading.'²⁹ Husain remembers the group's early struggles in an interview with art historian Yashodhara Dalmia, "Some of the professors at the J. J. School of Art used to tell the students, 'Don't mix with these fellows. They are destroying Indian art. Behind them are

²⁸ Jag Mohan, "Two Exhibitions in the City", *Souza in the 40's* (Grosvenor Gallery, 2018), 27-28.

²⁹ Dalmia, 46.

three foreigners and they are destroying everything.’”³⁰ These foreigners that the conservative institutions were so suspicious of were three war emigres from Europe who settled in Bombay, Rudolf von Leydon (1908-1983), Walter Langhammer (1905-1977), and Emmanuel Schlesinger (1896-1968). Von Leyden, or Rudi as he was known in Bombay, was a former member of Germany’s communist party. He fled Germany after the burning of the Reichstag and arrived in Bombay in 1933. He worked as an art critic for *The Times of India* and had a strong bias towards young talent, encouraging K. H. Ara to pursue his artistic talents and providing him with a monthly stipend until he could establish himself.³¹ Despite the harsh critiques the Progressive’s were met with after their first show in 1949, Rudi’s review in *The Times of India* came with praise,

The six artists... have formed a distinct group inspite of their very different artistic approaches and tempers. They are not satisfied with the ready-made conventions either of the academic western or the academic traditional schools. ... Those who have followed these artists over the past years will know of the struggles, the experiments, the trials that lie behind the considerable achievement which this exhibition represents.³²

Rudi’s contributions to the success of the members of the Progressive Artists Group were profound. His enthusiastic and constant support of young Indian artists helped change the arrangement of the Indian art scene until he left India in the late 1960s.

Walter Langhammer worked as an art teacher in Austria until he fled for Bombay with his Jewish wife, Kathe, in 1938 after one of his Indian students encouraged them to do so. Upon arriving in Bombay, both he and his wife were arrested by the British as prisoners of war and

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 63.

³² Rudi von Leyden, “Artists’ Exhibition in Bombay, Distinct Group,” *The Times of India*, July 9, 1949, quoted in Dalmia, *Making of Modern Indian Art*, 46.

were not released until 1941 after Kathe wrote to Rudi to show the British officers the many anti-Nazi cartoons Walter had drawn for Austrian newspapers.³³ Walter and Kathe Langhammer ran a salon where many young painters would come and discuss their works, and Walter served on the committee of the Bombay Art Society. Walter would invite artists such as F. N. Souza and S. H. Raza into his studio to tell them stories about the art scene in Europe before he had left.³⁴ In an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia, S. H. Raza recalls how Walter would help him and other artists by teaching them how to interpret art,

Professor Walter Langhammer took to me very kindly and not only gave his studio for me to work where he stayed but also helped me with his views on the kind of work I was doing then. He used to put in front of me paintings by Raphael, El Greco, Monet, and Cézanne, paintings of the Persian, Rajput and Mughal miniatures and he would say, 'Look at these paintings and tell me what is happening there.' It was a tough job but it was an eminent awareness of form which started developing in me which I started to follow in time to come.³⁵

Langhammer pushed artists to take influence from both European and Asian influences. By showing Raza and other artists reproductions of both European masters and traditional Indian painting, it encouraged them to think critically about the kind of work they themselves were creating.

Emmanuel Schlesinger was an Austrian Jew who fled Germany for Bombay in the early 1940s. A wealthy pharmacist, he had a large art collection that he was forced to leave behind in Germany, but continued his patronage for the arts in Bombay.³⁶ He would travel around Bombay to buy art from young artists and encourage them to create more. M. F. Husain recalls, "He was

³³ Dalmia, 60.

³⁴ Conor Macklin, *Souza in the 40's*, 18.

³⁵ S.H. Raza in an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, 61.

³⁶ Dalmia, 64.

like a father figure. I used to tell him sometimes that I love that painting of *The Woman and the Parrot* [done by Husain in the 1950s]. So when he was going to hospital he said ‘You take the painting and if I come back from the hospital you can give it back to me. If I don’t, you keep it.’ He came back but refused to take it back.”³⁷ Schlesinger’s generosity provided many artists with the financial means to continue their passion and establish themselves in the scene. Schlesinger passed away in 1968 and had offered to donate his collection to Bombay’s national museum of fine art, the Prince of Wales museum before his death, but the museum denied his offer as they did not deem Indian modern art part of India’s national heritage.³⁸

The makeup of the Progressive Artists Group changed drastically after Souza left India in 1949. Raza and Bakre left in 1950, while Husain, Ara, and Gade continued on in India, adding new members to the group such as Vasudeo S. Gaitonde, Mohan Samant, Krishen Khanna, and Bhanu Rajapadhyia, the only female member of the group. By 1952, Samant left for the United States, Gade began teaching in Delhi, and Khanna left for Madras. Rajapadhyia stopped painting and found a passion for fashion design, becoming the first Indian to win an Oscar in any category for her costume designs for *Gandhi*, 1982. The group officially disbanded in 1954, the artists remained friends but had stopped working together, and as Rajapadhyia described it, “Each one was listening to his inner call.”³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 71.

1

Francis Newton Souza

The biggest setback to the Bombay Progressive Artists Group was Francis Newton Souza's departure from India in 1949. Within two years of the group's inception, its most prominent member had left. Souza took inspiration for his art from many aspects of his life. As he was born into a Roman Catholic family in Portuguese Goa in 1924, Catholic imagery was an important aspect of his art throughout his life. Souza's childhood contained many hardships, his father died three months after his birth, and his sister died within a year after. His mother was left alone with her son and a mass of debts, so she decided to disguise herself and escape to Bombay with the young Souza. Shortly after their arrival Souza caught smallpox and had to be sent back to Goa to be looked after by his grandmother. His mother prayed for his well-being and promised that if he survived, she would make him a Jesuit priest. Souza survived, and his mother added 'Francis' to his name as a sign of gratitude to Goa's patron saint, St. Francis Xavier.⁴⁰ He would later write,

The Roman Catholic Church had a tremendous influence on me, not its dogmas but its grand architecture and the splendour of its services... The wooden saints painted with gold and bright colours staring vacantly out of their niches. The smell of incense. And the enormous crucifix with the impaled image of a Man supposed to be the Son of God, scourged and dripping with matted hair tangled in plaited thorns.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists* (Vikas, 1978), 3–4.

⁴¹ F.N. Souza, "A Fragment of an Autobiography," *Words & Lines*, (Nitin Bhayana, 1997), 10.

When Souza returned to Bombay, his mother had become a successful dressmaker and had enough money to put him through school. Of course, Souza never became the priest that his mother wanted; he was expelled from his Jesuit high school for drawing pornographic pictures in the bathrooms.⁴² Souza knew he wanted to become an artist, and Catholic themes remained a prominent subject of his works throughout his career.

In 1940, Souza joined the J. J. School of Art which taught the British academic tradition and by that point had ties to the Royal Academy of Art in London. According to Geeta Kapur, Souza was the “prize student of the art school,” as he had mastered the academic rules he had been taught.⁴³ During his studies, he rejected his education and learned from books and reproductions of artworks by European modernists. He got involved in the nationalist movement and was suspended from the J.J. School of Art for participating in a demonstration against the British rule in India in 1945. It was on that day that Souza painted one of his first important works, *The Blue Lady*,

On the day I was expelled from the JJ School of Art in 1945, I marched home indignantly, told my astonished mother what had happened—I was 21 years old then, had grown an Errol Flynn moustache and I smoked cigarettes from a holder like Robert Donat—and started furiously painting in oils with a palette knife on a large piece of plywood my mother had bought to use as a cutting table top for dressmaking. I painted an azure nude with a still-life and landscape in the background. I finished the painting in an hour of white heat. I titled it *The Blue Lady* and exhibited it in my first one man show December 1945. Fifty selected paintings and drawings from a total of a couple of hundred works, all done within six months from the date of my expulsion.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 5.

⁴³ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 10.

⁴⁴ Francis Newton Souza, “The Progressive Artists Group”, *Patriot Magazine*, 12 February 1984, quoted in Dalmia, 79-80.

Between his expulsion and his first solo show, Souza returned to Goa and painted peasants and landscapes. These paintings made up the bulk of the work exhibited at his show, which was held at the Bombay Art Society. The show was organized by Rudi Von Leyden, who championed Souza and other members of the Progressive Artists Group. Almost all of the works in the show sold, among them was *The Blue Lady* which was purchased by the Baroda Museum in Gujarat, and *Ave Maria*, which was purchased by Maria Figueiredo, who would become his wife two years later.⁴⁵

Throughout his schooling, Souza aligned himself with Marxism, and it was around this time that he joined the Communist Party of India. In this early period, Souza was dedicated to painting scenes of village life and urban peasants, as seen in fig. 14, his 1944 gouache on paper work entitled *Beggars in Bombay*. The party was open to having Souza as a member as his early paintings strongly aligned with communist party values. His style of painting broadly belonged to the social realist category as he painted real experiences of the poor, from Goan peasants to the lowest of the Bombay proletariat.⁴⁶ His paintings reflected class-types and made clear who he believed to be noble and villainous in society, with titles such as *The Criminal and the Judge are Made of the Same Stuff* and *After Work the Whole Day in the Fields We Have No Rice to Eat*, which was later renamed *The Family*, 1947 (fig. 16).⁴⁷

Beggars in Bombay was created while he was still attending the J. J. School of Art and before he joined the Communist Party of India, but the work clearly demonstrates his alignment with communist ideals and fits into the social realist category. *Beggars in Bombay* draws attention to the poverty and struggles of people of the lowest class in Bombay at the time. The

⁴⁵ Conor Macklin, *Souza in the 40's* (Grosvenor Gallery, 2018), 20.

⁴⁶ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 7.

⁴⁷ Macklin, *Souza in the 40's*, 26.

central figure is wearing nothing but his underwear and holds out his hand as if he is asking for money. His right leg is missing and he uses a cane and a knee crutch to hold himself up. Behind him are a naked man with his back turned and a topless woman in profile begging with a bowl. To his left are a seated man and woman, and in front of him is a very dark man sitting in a cart, so skinny that his ribs protrude from his back. Each of these six figures have facial expressions of agony and desperation. In the lower portion of the picture the viewer sees a skinny white dog and a malnourished child lying on a red cloth. On the wall behind the beggars are two red posters in the style of communist propaganda, the poster on the left has “Francis” written on it, while the poster on the right reads “Souza 1944.”

Souza’s two renditions of *The Family* from 1946 (fig. 15) and 1947 (fig. 16) are more refined examples of the artist’s social realist phase. Both paintings are oil and board, and center around a Goan family’s mealtime. In the earlier painting, the family is situated inside of the house. The mother and the two kids sit on the ground, while the father sits on a bench. Every family member holds a dish, and around the family are many vases and vessels. The father and son appear to be in conversation, while the mother listens and the daughter sips from her cup. The walls of the house are painted with visions of fields and trees, and there is a window behind the mother which looks out at a tree. The ground is painted with thickly applied paint, to signify that the floor is plastered with cow dung. About his own home in Goa Souza has written,

There was no table. I had to squat on a mat to write and paint and eat my food. The floor was overlaid with a thick paste of cow-dung spread manually in a pattern of semi-concentric circles. There were little toads in every hole in the walls, and the corners

seemed tied together by strings of cobwebs. Two holy pictures hung close to each other: Christ and the Madonna with their hearts in their hands.⁴⁸

The house here could be modeled after Souza's own, although many houses in Goa must have had a similar layout. The family eats around the floor as there is no table, and on the wall next to the mother's head is a portrait of the Madonna and Christ. The mother also wears a rosary with a cross, further identifying the family as Catholic.

There is an immediately identifiable change of style between *The Family*, 1946 and the later version from 1947. The earlier painting is made in a much more realist style, while in *The Family*, 1947, Souza seems to borrow more from styles of western primitivism. The face of the father, in particular, seems to be modeled from something along the likes of Pablo Picasso's *Self Portrait*, 1907 (fig. 17), with his defined nose and exaggerated almond-shaped eyes. This association makes the family appear more African than Indian, as the "primitive" influence most likely came from African masks. Unlike the earlier rendition of *The Family*, this family is posing on the steps of a home, rather than being candid inside. The parents and daughter sit on the top step, while the son stands two steps below with his hands by his sides. The parents have abnormally large hands and feet, the mother has one hand on her lap and one to her side, while the father holds his right hand up to his chest and the other on his lap. The mother and son have similar pleasant expressions, while the daughter and father's faces are more straight. Both parents in *The Family*, 1947 are fully clothed in yellow, orange, and red garb, but both children are only wearing tops and rather shockingly, both of them have their genitalia exposed. The son wears a white t-shirt that is too small for him, while the daughter wears a red top and is

⁴⁸ Francis Newton Souza, quoted in *Art and Masculinity in Post-War Britain: Reconstructing Home*, Home (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 109.

positioned directly facing the viewer. Her legs are slightly spread, revealing her vagina.

Portraying a young girl's genitalia in such a fashion was surely looked down upon by many people (as it still is today), but it was Souza's desire to break conservative norms in the art world, though in this case he has done so rather distastefully, from a contemporary perspective.

Though the family is sitting on steps, it doesn't seem like the steps lead anywhere. Behind them is a yellow wall with a window displaying a still life of a meal consisting of fish and fruit, as well as two bottles. As Goa is on the coast, seafood is an important part of the Goan diet. At the family's feet are empty bowls and a large white and gold toad. Souza wrote that his home was full of toads, but this toad is especially large and its color makes it seem ornamental rather than real. The original title of the work was *After Work the Whole Day in the Fields We Have No Rice to Eat*, so perhaps the food in the background does not belong to the family in the painting, but to the family that they work for. It would then make sense that they were outside with their bowls, as they would not be allowed to dine in the same room as their employer.

It was in 1947 that Souza formed the Progressive Artists Group. Protesting the academic art taught in the British schools and the revivalist style of the Bengal School, Souza wanted to put together a group of artists that had similar views and individualistic styles. The group did not necessarily share a common genre or style: each member had his own technique. Souza first recruited Sayed Hazer Raza and Krishnaji Howlaji Ara, and later joined Maqbool Fida Husain, Sadanand K. Bakre, and Hari Ambadas Gade. With harsh words, Souza described his feelings towards the popular art in Bombay in the 1940s, writing,

I had begun to notice that the J. J. School of Art turned out an awful number of bad artists year after year, and the Bombay Art Society showed awful crap in its Annual Exhibitions which comprised the amateur efforts of some memsahibs in

India who were pampered by British imperialism. Hence their pretty-pretty paintings together with the work of several artists coming out of the art school exhibited once a year in the Art Society had no direction, no goal, no inspiration, no energy—regardless of the style or method they chose to work in. It then occurred to me to form a group to give ourselves an incentive. Ganging up in a collective ego is stronger than a single ego. It is easier for a mob to carry out a lynching; and in this case, we found it necessary to lynch the kind of art inculcated by the J. J. School of Art and exhibited in the Bombay Art Society.⁴⁹

With India becoming free from the British and entering a new stage of its existence, Souza felt that the Indian art world should also be freed from the British academicism dominating the scene in Bombay.

Souza had forged an alliance between the group and the Communist Party of India, and the group had their meetings at the Communist Party headquarters, but within a year that relationship had turned sour. Top members of the party disrupted one of Souza's solo shows, claiming it as a "manifestation of bourgeois aesthetics, unfit for the proletariat cause."⁵⁰ On the severing of ties between the Progressive Artists Group and the Communist Party, Souza wrote, "I left the Communist Party because they told me to paint in this way and that. I was estranged from many cliques who wanted me to paint what would please them. I don't believe that a true artist paints for coteries or for the proletariat. I believe with all my soul that he paints solely for himself."⁵¹ While Souza was still politically aligned with communist principles, he valued his freedom as an artist and did not want to be tied down to a group that would restrict his creative process.

⁴⁹ Francis Newton Souza, "The Progressive Artists' Group," *Patriot Magazine*, 8 February, 1984, quoted in Dalmia, 42-43.

⁵⁰ Dalmia, 43.

⁵¹ Macklin, *Souza in the 40's*, 27.

With ties between the Progressive Artists Group and the Communist Party fading, Souza began painting works that strayed far from social realism. *Pietà*, 1947 (fig. 18) is an oil on canvas painting depicting the famous scene of Mary with the dead body of Christ. In most renditions of the *Pietà*, such as Michaelangelo's, 1498-1499, and Titian's, 1575, Mary is cradling Christ's body on her lap, but in Souza's version, Christ is still nailed to the cross. Both Mary and Christ have grotesque faces with broken teeth. The painting is abstracted and constructed with squares and triangles painted in vibrant blues, yellows, greens, and reds. One of Souza's most important influences was the French Expressionist Georges Rouault (1871-1958). As a teenager, Rouault worked as a glass painter and restorer and worked with many stained glass windows in churches which inspired the colors of his paintings.⁵² Souza had also seen many stained glass windows in the churches in Goa, and thus *Pietà* is painted with the vibrant colors often seen in church windows. Souza's *Pietà* is a powerful statement of his feelings towards the Catholic religion and tradition. The artist wrote, "Renaissance painters painted men and women making them look like angels. I paint for angels, to show them what men and women really look like."⁵³ These strong feelings against the romanticization of scenes from the bible and the idealization of its characters came from his dissatisfaction with his Catholic upbringing, the Jesuit school he was expelled from, and the circumstances leading to his name, Francis. "[*Pietà*] is a savage work, not that I am a savage but I was brought up in the savagery of a corrupt and outdated medieval religion, the Roman Catholic church in Goa."⁵⁴

⁵² Monroe Wheeler, "The Prints of Georges Rouault" (Museum of Modern Art, 1938).

⁵³ Edwin Mullins, *F. N. Souza: An Introduction* (Anthony Blond, 1962), 82.

⁵⁴ Francis Newton Souza, quoted in Aziz Kurtha, *Francis Newton Souza: Bridging Western and Indian Modern Art* (Mapin, 2006), 18.

The Family and *Pietà* were two of Souza's more notable works of 1947, and they are both painted in very different styles. Souza attributes this difference to how India's independence and status as a new nation pushed him and other modern artists to explore new aesthetics to represent Indian art, writing, "The fact that both these paintings, i.e. *The Indian Family* and *The Pietà*, one secular and one religious, were painted in 1947, demonstrates in a way that Modern Indian Art was clinched with the Independence of India... by finding a new Aesthetic."⁵⁵ In moving away from British academic realism and the Bengal School's obsession with reviving India's pre-colonial traditions of art, Souza and the Progressive Artists Group experimented with modern western influences, religious traditions, and working-class struggles. As each member of the group embodied a different aesthetic aspect of Indian modern art, they found that no one aesthetic could epitomize modern Indian art.

In 1949, Souza showed four works at a show hosted by the Art Society of India. One of the works, *Self-Portrait*, 1949 (fig. 19), was the cause of much controversy. With an expressionist tone, Souza paints his nude body in reds, greens, and blues. He stands upright with his left arm bent, holding a paintbrush in his left hand. He is skinny and keeps a straight, slightly pleasant expression on his face. The brushstrokes remain visible throughout the painting, and paint is applied more thickly in certain areas, such as in his pubic hair. The floor he stands on has green, red, orange, yellow, and blue tiles. On the left side of the canvas is a table, and to the right behind Souza is an abstract geometric form and a thick frame on the wall. The wall is painted with a blending of colors used on his body and the floor. The artist Krishen Khanna recalled his visit to the exhibition,

⁵⁵ Ibid.

As I walked up the stairs, I passed a rather well-dressed woman muttering to herself. At first I thought she was chanting a mantra. I listened more intently and heard her saying quite audibly, ‘Disgusting, absolutely disgusting.’ That was a prelude to what I was about to see. It was an exhibition of Francis Newton Souza. Right in the middle of the center-wall was his self portrait, in the nude... Of course, females in the nude were an acknowledged and much desired subject matter; but males, in spite of the legendary Michelangelo, had to keep their underpants on and their flies buttoned up. The police intervened and the ‘offending’ portion of the anatomy in the self-portrait was suitably covered, thereby attracting still more attention.⁵⁶

Souza’s studio was raided by the police, and he was charged with obscenity.⁵⁷ The painting is a shockingly modern feat, as nude self-portraits by male artists were not popular in the west, let alone in India, and is another example of how Souza experimented with new aesthetics and ideas as a means of being a progressive artist. As the reaction that Khanna recalled expresses, the Indian art world was not ready to receive Souza’s art. His treatment by the police discouraged him greatly, and it was a few months later that Souza would have his “farewell exhibition” before departing for London, where he thought he could more comfortably pursue his ideas of modern art.

Souza also took influence from older traditions of Indian art, particularly after visiting the Indian Art Exhibition of 1948 with Husain. In 1948, the Royal Academy organized a grand exhibition to mark Indian independence, which was held at the Burlington House in London and the Viceregal Lodge in Delhi. The exhibition was a retrospective of five thousand years of Indian art, and played an important role in determining the canon and hierarchies of Indian art.

According to Dalmia,

⁵⁶ Krishen Khanna, “Memories of a Progressive Past,” *Art India Magazine* 2, no. 1 (1997), quoted in *Souza in the 40’s*, 30.

⁵⁷ Macklin, 30.

The sculptures of the ancient and medieval period were given the status of the highest symbols of Indian artistic achievement... In privileging the ancient, it was sculpture that was made the prime representative of India's great heritage, with an aim to ward off its both earlier attributes of being 'barbaric' and the verdict of the inability of the Hindus to evolve real sculpture.⁵⁸

The exhibition created a cohesive history of Indian art, and gave Indian art its own well-deserved place in history. The influence of the exhibition can clearly be seen in *The Jealous Lover*, 1949 (fig. 20). The painting depicts a man with knife in hand, facing away from a woman. Both figures are nude, and the man is painted in pale beiges and browns. He is in profile but has no bodily or facial features, and stands in a sculpted pose with a slight squat. The woman is painted with very vibrant greens and reds, and has a defined nose and lips. Her eyes are wide and almond-shaped. She wears a decorative headdress and a suite of gold jewelry consisting of a necklace, earrings, and anklets. She has very large and exaggerated round breasts and wide hips and thighs. She stands in a Yakshi's pose, with one leg bent out and crossed over the other. Yakshis are female nature spirits that appear in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist mythology, who have the ability to make a tree bear fruit with a touch.⁵⁹ Yakshis are seen as fertility figures, and have very wide hips and are often depicted with almost spherical breasts. The woman in Souza's *Jealous Lover* also embodies features which are reminiscent of the woman in the erotic sculptures of the Khajuraho temple (fig. 21).

When looking at ancient Indian art, Souza seems to have been more inspired by sculpture than painting. In describing Souza's influence, a friend of the artist, the theatre director Ebrahim Alkazi, wrote,

⁵⁸ Dalmia, 49.

⁵⁹ "Yakshi | The Art Institute of Chicago."

I remember Souza and Husain came to Delhi to see and suddenly their eyes were opened to the richness of Indian art, particularly in sculpture... Then there is the work inspired by Khajuraho, where the woman is derived from classical form and the man is more contemporary and somewhat autobiographical. Then there is the yakshini pose, the full-breasted woman with the foot touching the tree. He explored this very pervasive influence of sculpture for quite some time.⁶⁰

While Souza's style changed many times over his career, the female nude, whether rendered tenderly or grotesquely, remained a central component of his work. In Indian sculpture, the female nude is often dramatized and used as a means of representing countless themes and beliefs, so Souza's fascination with ancient sculpture is no surprise. Souza's blending of modern and ancient themes and techniques was in part influenced by Husain. After the two artists went to the Great Indian art exhibition together in 1948, Husain created a series of paintings inspired by Basohli miniatures and ancient sculpture, which he exhibited in 1949 at the Bombay Art Society. Husain recalls, "Nobody had seen it—not even Souza. At the opening he caught hold of me and took me to the Irani restaurant opposite and said, 'Just tell me, what is this? Have you discovered something new?'"⁶¹ What Husain had discovered was new in India, the blending of the old with the contemporary. He had taken influence from the past but was not reviving pre-colonial forms or methods as the Bengal School artists were doing, and Souza followed suit.

One of the last paintings Souza made before leaving for England was *Indian Scene*, 1949 (fig. 22).⁶² As the title suggests, Souza is borrowing from many aspects of Indian culture. The two women in the foreground have large breasts, as seen in Indian temple sculptures of fertility figures. The darker woman standing up wears a skirt with floral decorations, while the woman

⁶⁰ Ebrahim Alkazi, *Ebrahim Alkazi: Directing Art : The Making of a Modern Indian Art World* (Art Heritage, 2016) 81.

⁶¹ Dalmia, 50.

⁶² Kurtha, 19.

sitting down is nude and painted with greens and blues. The dark man in the center of the painting wears a traditional *lungi*. The faces of the darker couple are rendered with very simple lines, and their bodies are painted using a uniform color and even brushstrokes. To the right of the couple is a young boy painted in a light brown. Souza does not give the boy any clothing or details on his body, aside from his nose, eyes, eyebrows, and mouth, which again are rendered with simple lines. Behind him is a red structure with a window which two figures peer out of, and above the structure, Souza has painted a few tribal motifs. At the center top of the canvas is a building atop a hill which is quite possibly a church, and to the middle left of the canvas and down the hill is the village.

The group had their first exhibition together in 1949, and only two years after its inception, Souza had changed his beliefs about the group and what it should stand for. He fell out with the Communist Party of India, which he was a member of during the Progressive Artist's beginnings. In his manifesto, Souza wanted to revolutionize modern Indian art, as well as encourage a new Indian unity. As the years went on, Souza became frustrated that he could not reach the goals that he had set out in his manifesto. In the catalog for the 1949 Progressive Artists Group exhibition in Bombay, he wrote,

I do not quite understand now, why we still call our Group "Progressive." We have changed all the chauvinist ideas and the Leftist fanaticism which we had incorporated in our manifesto at the inception of the Group We found this in the course of working an impossibility . . . the gulf between the so-called people and the artists cannot be bridged. Today we paint with absolute freedom for contents and techniques, almost anarchic; save that we are governed by one or two sound elemental and eternal laws, of aesthetic order, plastic coordination and colour composition.⁶³

⁶³ Francis Newton Souza, "The Progressive Artists Group," *Patriot Magazine*, 8 February 1976, quoted in Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 9.

Souza's obvious dissatisfaction with the status of the Indian public's views towards his art led him to give up on his vision of connecting art and the people. The communist party had acted against him, claiming that his art was not for the people, which led Souza to describe the group's earlier involvement with the party as "leftist fanaticism." In describing this farewell exhibition, Souza seems to have relinquished all ties to the former values of the Progressive Artists Group, and now he and his peers paint with "absolute freedom."

The first few years in London were difficult for Souza, his living conditions were poor and he was partially supported by odd jobs worked by his wife, Maria. He is said to have wheeled carts of his paintings up and down Bond and Oxford streets trying to sell them, but he rarely had any luck.⁶⁴ Souza received some help from the Indian High Commissioner in Britain, Krishna Menon, who sponsored Souza to create a series of murals for the Indian Student's Bureau in London and arranged an exhibition of his paintings at the India House in 1951.⁶⁵ Souza struggled to find work and make money, and in early 1954, he seriously considered returning to India. His first biographer, Edwin Mullins, wrote, "It seemed the only way he [Souza] could go on painting, for at least in India he could sleep in the street if necessary, and live on rice ... if he had been able to find enough money for the passage, he would probably have left."⁶⁶ But later that year, Souza finally had his major breakthrough, which was due in part to his skillful writing. He submitted the autobiographical essay "Nirvana of a Maggot" to the publication *Encounter* in 1954, and the editor, Stephen Spender, took interest in Souza and his paintings. He purchased one of his works and introduced him to a major British collector named

⁶⁴ P.D. Mukherji, *Ebrahim Alkazi: Directing Art : The Making of a Modern Indian Art World*, 81.

⁶⁵ Dalmia, 88.

⁶⁶ Mullins, 23.

Peter Watson, which ultimately led to his establishment in the British art scene. On this interaction, Souza wrote,

When I first showed my paintings to an Englishman, Peter Watson, in London in the 1950s, his immediate reaction was: “This is not Indian Art.” Mr. Watson happened to be a big shot at the Institute of Contemporary Art. He was arranging an exhibition of British painting and sculpture at the Institute and he invited me to participate only because I was introduced to him by Stephen Spender... Watson selected three of my works for the show which included major British artists like Graham Sutherland, Henry Moore, Ivon Hitchens, Francis Bacon et al. Being the only Indian, I was the odd-man-out, but oddly enough, all my three paintings were sold before the exhibition opened. Spender bought one; the other two were bought by Watson himself. Thereafter, nobody who looked at my work said: “This is not Indian Art.” “This is a Souza” was a more apt description of my work from then on.⁶⁷

Souza is obviously proud of his accomplishments during his time in London. Watson’s comment that Souza’s art was not Indian art came from an old expectation that an Indian artist was supposed to produce art which looked like the popular art that came from the subcontinent, but after leaving India, Souza’s work changed drastically.

In his early London works, the influence of Rouault became increasingly clear. Souza borrowed Rouault’s methods of thickly caking the surface of the canvas with paint and using thick black lines. While women remained a central theme in Souza’s work, as Geeta Kapur points out, after 1953, the majority of the women he paints appear to be European. *Standing Nude*, 1957 (fig. 23), is an example of such a painting. The thickly applied paint and the black lines connecting the nose to the eyes are very reminiscent of Rouault, and the white and yellows Souza uses to create her pigment make her appear to be of European descent. The influences of

⁶⁷ Francis Newton Souza, “Cultural Imperialism” (Surya-Galerie Freinsheim, 1976).

temple sculptures that Souza began utilizing in his nudes after 1948 are far less potent; the woman's breasts are less exaggerated and her stance is much less bold and confident than the female figures in his earlier nudes. Souza painted many of his grotesque heads in London. *Jesting Pilate*, 1956 (fig. 24) and *Head of a Woman*, 1956 (fig. 25) are early examples of these heads, which do not display any kind of resemblance to traditions of Indian art. *Jesting Pilate* is a portrait of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who ordered Christ's execution. Souza portrays him as an evil, monstrous-looking being, continuing his theme of portraying religious figures in a grotesque fashion. Souza continued painting heads throughout his life, and later in his career, they would become even more mutilated and monstrous than the ones he painted in the 1950s.

At the exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1954, Souza met Victor Musgrave, the owner of Gallery One. Musgrave gave Souza a solo show at Gallery One in February of 1955, the same time his essay in *Encounter* was published.⁶⁸ Every painting sold and the show received favorable reviews from critics, most notably John Berger who wrote, "How much Souza's pictures derive from western art and how much from the hieratic temple traditions of his country, I cannot say. Analysis breaks down and intuition takes over. It is obvious that he is a superb designer and an excellent draughtsman. But I find it quite impossible to assess his work comparatively. Because he straddles several traditions and serves none."⁶⁹ Berger perfectly captures Souza's essence in his analysis, as Souza plays with various traditions, but does not adhere to one in particular. Between 1955 and 1961, Souza had seven solo shows with Gallery One, and in 1956, a wealthy American collector named Harold Kovner saw Souza's work in Paris and offered Souza enough money to live comfortably in exchange for a couple paintings

⁶⁸ Dalmia, 88.

⁶⁹ John Berger, "An Indian Painter," *The New Statesman*, February 26, 1955, 277–78, quoted in Dalmia, 88.

every month, a deal which lasted until 1960.⁷⁰ This was the first time in Souza's life that he did not have to worry about money, but with his success came a drinking problem and his alcoholism eventually began to affect his work.⁷¹ In 1960, Souza travelled to Italy on a government scholarship, and from Italy he went to India for the first time since he left in 1949. He visited Goa and Bombay, and felt incredibly bored with both places. In an interview he did with *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1960, he said,

... we have no tradition in this country in art and letters... We have no continuity in our culture, no development. It has been invaded successfully and destroyed by vandals, missionaries, conquistadors, and Victorians. Nor have we the vitality to give birth to new traditions, to create new forms, literary and artistic, springing from the waste and dilapidation that surrounded and still surrounds us.. I do not know if the invaders successfully castrated our aesthetic potentiality one by one, or we just dwindled on our own and became culturally impotent.⁷²

His assessment of Indian tradition and culture is obviously false, and his attacks on his home country are reminiscent of the imperial beliefs against India that he had sought to challenge. Geeta Kapur wrote, "Souza has never realized that a colonial inherits a fractured psyche and that he must first smash the reflecting mirror the West has provided him if he is to begin to see himself clearly."⁷³ His contempt for Indian culture and tradition are a product of his colonial upbringing and was further augmented by his self-imposed exile, but his opinions were to soon change.

⁷⁰ Dalmia, 89.

⁷¹ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 14.

⁷² Ibid., 42.

⁷³ Ibid., 41.

Souza quickly left India and returned to London, where he lived until his move to New York in 1967. Two years after returning to London, Souza was one of 22 Indian artists selected for the “Commonwealth Art Today” exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute (formerly the Imperial Institute) in London. He exhibited a landscape, and Progressive Artists Group affiliates S.H. Raza, Akbar Padamsee, Tyeb Mehta, and Mohan Samant also exhibited. According to the catalog, the purpose of the exhibition was to “spread knowledge of the Commonwealth among its peoples and to foster understanding between them.”⁷⁴ Twenty-three nations formerly belonging to the British empire were invited to participate: Australia, British Guiana, Canada, Ceylon, Cyprus, “East Africa” (Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya, and Zanzibar were merged into one section), Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Malaya, Malta, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rhodesia, Northern and Southern Sierra Leone, Singapore, and Trinidad and Tobago. Other than the fact that these countries were once British, there were few other connections. Obviously, nations such as Canada had very different experiences with imperialism than Pakistan, Jamaica, or Nigeria.

Though the exhibition was supposed to highlight the artistic practices of formerly British nations, the 24th nation that exhibited was the United Kingdom, and the catalog’s foreword emphasizes the importance of British art over the art of the other exhibited countries. Only three British artists were selected to exhibit, Henry Moore, Victor Pasmore, and Graham Sutherland. In the catalog, each nation was given one photograph to accompany its section, except for the United Kingdom which was given one photograph for each artist. Eric Newton, Art Adviser to

⁷⁴ Kenneth Bradley, *Commonwealth Art Today: 7 November 1962 to 13 January 1963* (Commonwealth Institute, 1962), 7.

the Commonwealth Institute, writes in his foreword about the “injustice” of having so few British painters in an exhibition meant to highlight the work of the Commonwealth of Nations,

Out of a total of between 150 and 200 works, some contributing nations may feel that, in the matter of space, they have been too severely restricted to make their contribution as effective as it should have been. Such injustices are unavoidable. But one major injustice has been... the fact that the United Kingdom, the mother country, has been given the most restricted opportunity of all.... Each contributing nation has provided its own short explanatory foreword to the catalogue, but this brief introduction is hardly the appropriate place to ‘explain’ the art of the United Kingdom.⁷⁵

He continues in the introduction to the United Kingdom’s section, writing “to omit altogether any reference to the art of this country would have been eccentric. It would have been misleading, for the one major influence on local tradition in every commonwealth country that has been contributed to the exhibition must inevitably be that of the United Kingdom.”⁷⁶ Despite the fact that the exhibition was supposed to bring Commonwealth countries together, the organizers still curated and advertised the exhibition as another imperialist escapade. Unfortunately, this was not the last instance of this problem that Souza had to deal with, as he found much frustration after moving to the United States as well.

Abstract art was the popular style in the United States, so when Souza moved to New York his figurative work did not excite audiences as it had done in London. Some time between 1960 and the mid 1970s, Souza seemed to have changed his mind on what he had said to *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1960, and again became a strong proponent for Indian arts. He obviously did not appreciate western criticism towards Indian art, or perhaps he felt that only he

⁷⁵ Eric Newton, *Commonwealth Art Today*, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

and other Indians could criticize Indian art and culture, but in his 1976 essay “Cultural Imperialism,” he wrote,

John Canaday, art critic of The New York Times, visited the last Triennial Exhibition of Indian Art in New Delhi but failed to write a single word on the show. He told the art critic of the Times of India, Mr. Richard Bartholemew, ‘Indian art is hybrid.’ If modern Indian art is hybrid, what is the School of Paris? Matisse is “Persian”, Van Gogh is “Japanese”, Picasso is “African”, Gauguin is “Polynesian”. Indian artists who borrow from the School of Paris are home from home...⁷⁷

Canaday criticized Indian art for being hybrid, but many modern masters from the west borrowed from non-western cultures, so Souza’s claim that modern Indian art is “home from home” indicates that if modern art from non-western cultures is hybrid, so are the works of the western masters. Souza is emphasizing that it is impossible for modern Indian to just be seen as something borrowed from the west, as much of it is rooted in Indian culture. But Souza’s contempt for Canaday goes much further than arguing for equal footing for Indian and western modern art. He goes on to say that western art is dead and that India is being ignored and mistreated by western art institutions even though the country is producing the finest art in the world,

What I am saying bluntly is that Western art is dead. Contemporary Indian Art, as far as Fine Art goes, is the only vital, living activity anywhere in the world today. The latest American effort at this Year’s Biennale in Venice was a 4 inch block of wood stuck on the wall... India was not invited to show at Venice. India is never invited to the Documenta exhibitions at Kassel, West Germany, simply because all these major international art shows are really controlled by American funding to perpetuate this American Cultural Imperialism... But when the right opportunity comes, and it will not be long before it does, for India is fast growing into a major power, it will be seen that

⁷⁷ Francis Newton Souza, “Cultural Imperialism.”

Contemporary Indian Art is the finest in the world today, powerful, up to date, “far out” and superior to anything being done in the rest of the world.⁷⁸

Souza lived through Britain’s imperial era, and now recognizes the United State’s role as a superpower. He criticizes America’s institutions and politics and accuses the nation of perpetuating a form of cultural imperialism. Unfortunately, though in the 1970s it may have looked like India would soon turn into a major power, his projections were off, as India is still far from becoming the superpower that its previous leaders had pushed for it to become.

It’s safe to say that Souza found him and his art at home in the west, but his relationship with both the west and the east remained quite turbulent throughout his life. He began his artistic career by criticizing both areas. He revolted against the revivalist style of art which was made popular in India by the Bengal school, as well as against the historical style of painting taught by the western imperialists being taught and perpetuated within India. He found his influence in the western artists who rebelled against popular traditions in their own countries, but he gave up on his motherland quite quickly. Kapur was also critical of India when she wrote *Contemporary Indian Artists*, and at the end of her chapter on Souza, she writes about the possibility of the artist’s return to India: “A genuine act of rebellion or even mere agitation by one like Souza could still be worthwhile in a society such as ours.”⁷⁹ Souza was a savior in many ways. He stood for individualism and artistic freedom and his involvement in the Progressive Artists Group had such a large impact and forever changed the course of art in the subcontinent. When Souza wrote, his words were strong and hard-hitting, filled with the potential to incite rebellion, so it's

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 44-45.

no wonder that Kapur would consider nominating Souza to come home and provoke change, but Souza did not return to live in India until shortly before his death in 2002.

2

Maqbool Fida Husain

Maqbool Fida Husain was born in 1915 into a community of Sulaymani Bohras, a tightly-knit Indian branch of Shia Islam, in Pandhapur, Maharashtra. His mother died when he was three months old, and his father moved the family to Indore, where he worked as an accountant for a group of textile mills.⁸⁰ Tensions arose between Husain and his father and step-mother, and eventually he was sent away from Indore to live with his maternal grandmother in Siddhpur, Gujarat. His grandfather in Siddhpur was the head of a religious sect and he gave Husain a series of strict religious lessons. It was in Siddhpur that Husain learned Urdu and became infatuated with Urdu poetry. He learned Urdu calligraphy during his religious education, something he would later explore in his art. He returned to Indore after a year and a half, and began to explore the traditions of the city. Hindu and Muslim cultures had been long integrated in Indore, and even the Maharaja would take part in the grandest Muslim festivities.⁸¹ At the age of 17, Husain won an award at the Indore art exhibition, and persuaded his father to allow him to attend evening classes at the art school in Indore. After a few years, he sought to further pursue his goals as an artist, and got accepted to the J. J. School of Art in Bombay. He was called back home from Bombay almost as soon as he arrived, as his father lost his job and needed his help.

He returned to Bombay in 1937 and lived in an impoverished area on his own, with pimps and prostitutes as neighbors. He never finished his education, and supported himself by painting billboards. As many of the billboards he painted were for Bollywood movies, he was

⁸⁰ Shiv S. Kapur, *Husain*, (Abrams, 1972), 30.

⁸¹ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 118.

exposed to film culture and developed a strong passion for Bollywood, and later in his career he would make his own films. He married Fazila Bibi in 1941, and the two of them moved into an area populated by the tight-knit Sulaymani Bohras, his landlord only charged his family an equivalent of \$3 a month. From 1941-1947, he worked for a company that made nursery furniture and toys. The figures in these simple toys (fig. 26) would reappear in many of his later drawings and paintings. The subjects came from various aspects of Indian culture, including royalty, temple architecture, and religious festivities, themes that remained with him throughout his career. During this period, Husain painted all the time, and attempted to visit and take part in as many exhibitions as he could, but it took a long time before he was recognized for his talents. In 1947, he won an award at the Bombay Art Society's annual exhibition, where Francis Newton Souza noticed him and invited him to join the Bombay Progressive Artists Group.

The six original members of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group were all different in terms of their backgrounds and artistic styles, but Maqbool Fida Husain's desires for his future stand out. While others went abroad in the late 1940s and early '50s, Husain stayed in India. After being invited to be a founding member of the group, Souza mentored him and expanded his knowledge of European modern art and art historical texts.⁸² Husain was less inspired by European rebellion than Souza and realized that the late 1940s and 50s would be an incredibly important part of Indian history, as India had just become an independent nation. Like many Indian Muslims, he had to decide whether to stay in India or emigrate to Pakistan, and for Husain, being a member of the Indian nationalist movement meant believing in Hindu-Muslim unity, an ideal he had been long familiar with due to his upbringing in Indore. As he and his

⁸² Ibid., 120.

family had spent their whole lives in India, and Husain was already beginning to establish himself as an Indian painter, they decided to stay where his family had lived for generations.⁸³

Out of the group, Husain was the one to become India's superstar artist. Village life was the central aspect of his early work, but as he got older, he began painting religious figures, and important Indian people. "Why has Husain and only Husain acquired this immense popularity and success?" Geeta Kapur asks in her 1978 book, *Contemporary Indian Artists*. Her response is that,

In the first flush of independence, the intelligentsia concerned with matters of culture was naturally keen to discover and promote indigenous artists-writers, dramatists, film-makers. However, indigenism had to be in tune with an internationalism to which we could lay claim more confidently now that we were independent. The content of Husain's art, which mostly comprised traditional mythological, and folk themes, made an immediate appeal, even as his vigorously executed Expressionist idiom carried all the flavour of modernism.⁸⁴

Husain's paintings were the perfect blend of indigenism and modernism, and they arrived at the perfect time to magnify his popularity. Husain always had a simple way of describing himself, saying, "I am an Indian, and a painter, that is all."⁸⁵ With this modest description, it makes sense that almost all his works throughout his life had an Indian subject matter, with many of his early works focusing on the Indian village.

Husain took inspiration from the Indian-Hungarian artist Amrita Sher-Gil, who was one of the earliest modernists to become infatuated by Indian village life. Unlike Husain, Sher-Gil came from a place of economic privilege and received a foreign education. She was born in

⁸³ Dalmia, 106.

⁸⁴ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 124–25.

⁸⁵ Karin Zitzewitz, "I am an Indian, and a Painter, That is All", *Barefoot Across the Nation: M F Husain and the Idea of India*, (Routledge, 2011), 130.

Europe, and trained at art schools in Florence and Paris, becoming relatively successful within European circles. In the mid to late 1930s, she travelled extensively in India. She was very interested in the everyday lives of poor village people, who became the primary subjects of many of her later works. In Kapur's chapter on Husain in *Contemporary Indian Artists*, she writes, "Husain took Amrita's legacy further towards a more authentic stage. His villagers are not particularly beautiful; but surrounded by their tools, their animals, their magic signs and symbols, they appear more truly alive, secure and rooted in their environment."⁸⁶ Amrita Sher-Gil's depictions of Indian village life were reflections of her own mentality. She wanted to emphasize and identify with the Indian villagers in an attempt to connect with her Indian roots, but in reality, she was still perceived as an outsider. While moved by Sher-Gil's decisions to depict Indian village life and take inspiration from previous traditions of Indian art, Husain rejected the idea of reflecting his own image or beliefs onto the people in his canvas. Kapur's use of "authenticity" is especially important in her analysis, as Husain lived in India his whole life, working through poverty, he recognized that there is far more to the Indian villager than being representatives of melancholy and struggle.

Looking at one of M.F. Husain's early major paintings, *Holi*, 1951 (fig. 27), one can map out the characteristics that define his work in the context of the Progressive Artists Group and a new India. As the title suggests, Husain paints the Hindu festival, Holi. Though born a Muslim, Husain still recognizes the importance of Holi to the Indian people. The style of *Holi* strays away from previous styles of Indian art and adopts the characteristics of different styles of Western art,

⁸⁶ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 127.

but this is certainly not to say that the painting is any less “Indian” than works from previous eras of Indian history.

Holi’s background is made up of various colors. There is a light border painted around the six figures, but the border gives no hint as to what kind of environment the Holi festivities are taking place in, as the colors outside the border match the background within the border. Five of the figures are painted in multiple colors as if they have been sprayed by multiple *pichkari*s, the squirt guns used in Holi. Significantly, the majority of the figures are women. The woman on the right has been sprayed blue on her legs and left arm, her left foot has been sprayed green, and her chest yellow. Her painted body can still be seen through her translucent headscarf. She leans forward with a *pichkari*, spraying the dancing woman in front of her, the central figure of the painting, with red paint. The red is reflected on her face and arm, which was previously painted yellow and orange, her breasts are green and her pants are yellow. Behind the central figure, a woman turning away takes a large step, her toes exiting the light border Husain has created. In the lower-left of the painting, two women sit. One is painted with greens and blues, the other, holding a *pichkari*, is completely orange except for her right foot which is painted green. In the bottom center, there is a rectangular shape with a blue liquid in it, either water or paint. There is a *pichkari* sticking out of it, as well as a young boy reaching his hand into it. The boy is completely white, so it seems that he has not yet been sprayed with paint. The boy is looking away as if he has a target to spray with paint. It’s possible that the boy is a representation of Krishna; one legend behind the history of Holi is that the Hindu god Krishna painted his lover

Radha's face in a mischievous act.⁸⁷ Krishna appears in many artistic representations of Holi, often surrounded only by women.

The Progressive Artists Group wanted to modernize Indian art, but Husain did not want to remove Indian identity from his work. In many of Souza and members of the group's paintings, there is not always a sign that the work was made by an Indian, as they make no references to Indian people, culture, or their Indian identities. Husain made sure to keep his focus on India, later asking, "How can I go abstract when there are 600 million people around me in India?"⁸⁸ Husain believed in the social good of representation, as there are so many people in India, why not give them a place in a new national art history? While other members of the group painted landscapes and abstract compositions, Husain painted Indian people performing everyday tasks or rituals. Husain's idea of being a "progressive" artist was not to change or ignore Indian history and culture, but to find a new way to express it. The Bombay Progressives, particularly Souza, deplored the revivalist style of the Bengal School, who took many of their influences from pre-colonial traditions of Indian art as a means of rejecting the art of their colonial oppressors. While the Progressives also rejected the historical styles of art taught in India in the leading British art schools, they borrowed heavily from the European avant-garde, rejecting British and Indian revivalist art in the same way as European avant-garde groups, with a manifesto. Husain was fascinated by at least one Bengali artist, Jamini Roy, who, in the words of Partha Mitter, "went back to a utopian vision of a pure, robust and simple village art - whose formal purity was thoroughly modernist."⁸⁹ Husain may have strayed away from utopian visions in his early works, but shared Roy's interest in village art.

⁸⁷ "The Legend of Radha-Krishna | Story of Radha Krishna."

⁸⁸ Bingham, *Indian Art & Culture*, 56.

⁸⁹ Mitter, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 43.

In Rebecca M. Brown's book, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, she argues that western modern art relies heavily on the existence of non-western artforms. Paul Gauguin's (1848-1903) most notable works come from his time in Tahiti; Pablo Picasso relied heavily on African masks; and the early works of Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974) are full of tribal motifs. Brown examines a connection between modernism and colonialism, writing, "Modernity depends on a differential relation between those that are modern and those that are not yet modern, and colonialism often defends itself as dedicated to bringing those regions of the 'not yet' toward modernity."⁹⁰ While modernity may behave similarly to colonialism, as postcolonial nations are still heavily influenced by and attempting to catch up to the systems left behind by imperial powers, it is interesting that western modern art relies on the "not yet" cultures, the cultures that are "behind" the west. Looking at Husain's *Holi* from a background in western modern art, it's easy to see the influence of cubism on the artist, and the figures are colored in extraordinary pigments, much like in the works by the Fauves, such as Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and André Derain (1880-1954). But unlike the Fauves, Husain bases the coloring of his figures on a real experience. If Amelie Matisse, Henri's wife, walked through a Holi festival, she may have looked exactly like she did in her husband's 1905 painting of her, *Woman with a Hat*.

In *Holi*, Husain takes a number of different influences from Indian culture and folk art. The most obvious of these influences is the subject matter, as Holi is one of India's most significant festivals. In 1948, Husain and Souza went to the Great Indian Art Exhibition together, and on the exhibition's impact, Husain said, "Till then I was influenced by the Expressionists.

⁹⁰ Rebecca Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, (Duke University Press 2009), 6.

After visiting the exhibition I combined three periods, the form of the Gupta period, the strong contours of the Basohli period and the innocence of folk art...”⁹¹ Husain’s depiction of Holi was not the first time that the festival had been explored by a Muslim. During the Mughal era, which lasted from the early 16th century through the mid 19th century, India’s ruling class were Muslims, but they engaged in Hindu practices because it was part of the culture they ruled. The Mughals blended the cultures of India and Persia, a synthesis recognized as Indo-Persian culture. *Holi Festival*, 1770-85 (fig. 28) is a Mughal era miniature painting depicting a male member of the Mughal elite taking part in Holi festivities. In the Mughal *Holi Festival*, as was common with much of Indian painting from the period, almost all figures are in profile. All the women have very similar faces and facial expressions, almost as if they are direct copies of each other. In Husain’s *Holi*, all of the figures are similarly in profile, and the women also have almost identical faces, except for the colors.

Husain utilizes influences from various areas of Indian folk art in developing his style of the late 1940s and ‘50s, which we see in *Holi*. One of these influences comes from Husain’s fascination with Basohli miniatures, which he had seen at the great Indian Art Exhibition of 1948.⁹² Basohli is a town in the Jammu and Kashmir area of India which produced some of the earliest Pahari paintings, meaning paintings from the Himalayan areas of north India, produced between the 17th and 19th centuries. The backgrounds in Basohli miniatures are bright warm colors, usually reds, oranges, and yellows, and they usually have painted borders with similarly complimenting colors. Devidasa of Nurpur’s *Shiva and Parvati Playing Chaupar*, 1694-95 (fig. 29), shows two Hindu gods playing a classic Indian board game while sitting upon a tiger rug in

⁹¹ Ibid., 50.

⁹² Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 141.

a desert landscape. The desert landscape is marked by a yellow plane, leaving a hint of a cloudy sky at the top of the page. Similarly, the anonymously created *Siddhalakshmi and Kali*, ca. 1660-70 (fig. 30) presents the two gods in a plane marked by a brown-red plane. In *Holi*, Husain takes the colors associated with the backgrounds of Basohli miniatures and puts them into the background of his own composition. Unlike the Basohli paintings, he does not keep the background a single color, but rather uses the colors in sections in order to create a new approach. Husain creates a border similar to that of the miniatures, but again the border is not one color but a combination of the common colors seen in Basohli art.

Much like in the Mughal miniature painting of *Holi*, it is also common for figures in Basohli miniatures to be depicted in profile, with less important figures having almost identical faces and facial expressions. *Gita Govinda*, 1730 (fig. 31), shows a scene from *The Gita Govinda*, a poem written in the 12th century by the Indian poet Jayadeva. The poem is about the relationship between the Hindu god Krishna and a group of female cow herders. In the Basohli portrayal, all of the women are in profile, and their faces are non-descript. Their only differences are their dress and the color of their skin. In the three Basohli paintings mentioned, all of the figures have large, almond-shaped eyes. In other prominent forms of Indian miniature painting, such as those by the Mughals and Malwa school, the eyes of the figures are far less protruding, although they may share other stylistic components. In Husain's *Holi*, the figure's eyes are even more exaggerated and protruding than in the Basohli paintings. While color affects all other parts of the women's bodies in *Holi*, the eyes are left as white voids, vacant of any expression.

The second Indian folk influence key to developing Husain's style were Yakshi sculptures, particularly from the Gupta period, which again he saw at the exhibition of 1948. The

Sanchi Yakshi Figure, ca. 1st century CE (fig. 32) is an example of the kind of sculpture that Husain would have been looking at before painting the women in *Holi*. Like many Yakshis, she is bare-breasted but wears necklaces and other jewelry. The central figure in *Holi* shares important features with the *Sanchi Yakshi Figure*: they both have spherical breasts, a very small stomach, and wide hips. Husain chooses to remove the exquisite jewelry that the Yakshi wears when painting the women in *Holi*. His figures all have a distinctive but undecorated neck ornament, and the central and right-most figures wear bangles on their wrists. This is most likely due to Husain's affiliation with the lower-class, as in his earlier years he preferred to depict everyday village people in his paintings over the upper-class and lavish deities.

In a masterful blend of cubism and expressionism, Husain's *Peasant Couple*, 1950 (fig. 33), is a key early painting displaying Husain's fascination with village people. As the title suggests, the man and woman depicted are peasants. The woman in *Peasant Couple* resembles the woman to the far right in the *Holi* canvas. She is in profile facing left, with a large white eye. The width of her hips is greatly exaggerated and she wears a similar headscarf and ankle ornament. With her hand facing back, it appears that she is carrying something on her back, perhaps a large vessel for water. Like the women in *Holi*, the peasant woman is painted in various colors, but rather than the bright colors representative of the Holi festival, she is painted in earthen tones. The peasant man is painted as a very strong, brown figure, with a very defined chest and muscular arms. He is shirtless and wears a white *lungi*, wrap shorts similar to what Gandhi wore. He is bald and walks confidently, with his eyes closed and his back up-right. He wears a necklace with a square blue and green pendant, which sits above his chest. The background in *Peasant Couple* is made of sections of muddied earth tones painted with thick

brush strokes, obscuring any identifiable forms. We are not given any clear direction as to what the peasant couple is doing. They are obviously walking, but where they are walking to is of no importance to the viewer, as a stranger would not ask a random couple in a village where they are walking. Husain chooses to paint what he sees without too much context, while still providing an accurate and authentic vision of Indian village life. Even though the man is depicted as strong and able bodied, it is the woman who is carrying the heavy vessel on her back, as carrying water is traditionally a woman's responsibility in Indian villages.

As Husain began his artistic career painting billboards for Bollywood films, he was not intimidated by large canvases. He painted the large 48 x 96 in. *Man* (fig. 34) circa 1950. Like *Holi*, the background of *Man* is made up of areas of colors. The painting is loosely arranged as a triptych, with each section embodying one primary figure. In the center of the canvas is a black figure whose head we see in profile. He has a green eye and is sitting on a red stool in a position resembling Rodin's *The Thinker*. On either side of him are single slabs engraved with outlines of two torsos, the one to the left is painted with greens, reds, and black, and has two women, while the one to the right is flipped upside down and painted with aging off-white and yellows and depicts one woman and one man. The female torsos are painted in a similar style as the women in *Holi*, with large circular breasts, small stomachs, and wide hips. To the far left of the painting is another man, he is upside down and his head, also in profile, rests on a black bull with red horns. The man's head and chest are yellow, his arm is painted red and black, and leg blue and black. Around his body are rectangular shapes painted in reds, blues, greens, and black, perhaps representing his garment. To the far right of the painting is a woman who we see from a frontal perspective. Her eyes are yellow, the left side of her face and torso is painted blue, while the

right side is painted red. Her right hand is raised in the air and is painted white. Much like the women engraved on the slabs, her legs end at her thighs, and she also has large round breasts, a small stomach, and wide hips. Unlike the other figures, her accessories are defined, as she wears neck and waist ornaments. To her left is a smaller man who is painted green and wears beige shorts. He stands in profile with his head down and back leaning against a wall.

The central figure in *Man* is situated in a plane full of Indian iconography. The principal colors in the painting are reminiscent of the Indian flag, though muted and earthier. The slabs are suggestive of engraved tablets found in Indian temples, while the woman to the far right evokes Yakshi sculptures. Her raised right hand with palm facing forward is what is known as the Abhaya mudra, a gesture used in both Buddhist and Hindu iconography which represents fearlessness.⁹³ The bull has many connotations in Indian iconography, though perhaps the most famous is Nandi, a deity devoted to Lord Shiva, who Lord Shiva would use as a vehicle. Perhaps the man depicted upside down is a representation of Shiva, who is accompanied by Nandi. Carved and sculpted bulls are among the most common objects found in archaeological sites of the Indus Valley, including Mohenjo-Daro, which flourished between 2500-1700 BCE.⁹⁴ The figure between the central man and woman has his head down in a melancholic fashion and his shorts appear to be dirty, perhaps representing the issue of poverty throughout the subcontinent.

How one interprets the central figure, the “Man” himself, can change the meaning of the painting. Perhaps the Man is a representation of the artist, and the green slab is a canvas that he holds. As the artist is looking above his canvas, he considers India and its iconographic motifs for inspiration. The artist wants to use elements from Indian history and culture to fuel his artistic

⁹³ Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 2.

⁹⁴ Geeta Kapur, “Modernist Myths and the Exile of Maqbool Fida Husain,” *Barefoot Across the Nation: M F Husain and the Idea of India*, 23.

process, as well as pursue his ideas of modern Indian art in a newly independent nation. Or, maybe the Man is not an artist, and the green slab is not being held. Perhaps the Man is an embodiment of members of society in a newly independent India. The Man is sitting in the thinker's pose because he has much to contemplate. A political and societal leader has been assassinated, a new governmental system has been put in place, a partition has divided the country, violence between Hindus and Muslims ensues, etc. The contemplative being in society must determine where they stand and decide what they believe in. What surrounds the Man are elements of Indian culture and society that have withstood all change for hundreds if not thousands of years and these elements are what make India, India. In art historian Sonal Khullar's *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930-1990*, she examines Husain's *Man*, and compares other historian's readings of the central figure,

The central figure in the composition is nude, pensive, powerful, and primal, embodying oppositions that Kapur described as "savage and superhuman, demonic and wise." Yashodhara Dalmia viewed him as "a man from a dark autochthonous tribe, a representative of both the archetypal and the ordinary" who "sits contemplating the vortex of events that designate contemporary India."⁹⁵

Perhaps Husain's *Man* is left purposefully ambiguous, as it encourages the viewer to consider broader scopes of Indian culture and history. The central man is both "primitive" and contemporary, bridging the gap between indigenism and modernism, which Kapur believes to have attracted audiences to his work.

⁹⁵Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930-1990* (University of California Press, 2015), 105.

In many of Husain's paintings, including *Man*, the canvas is quite busy. There is little blank space; he fills the painting with as much content as he sees fit. Returning to Husain's famous question, "How can I go abstract when there are 600 million people around me in India?", it is clear that Husain chooses to paint what he and other Indians see and how they experience their environment. Daniel Herwitz, the son of pioneering modern Indian art collectors, Chester and Davida Herwitz, writes,

The Indian street or village is a place of overwhelming, over-crowded activity, where people wash, work, take counsel, feed children, sleep or pray – in fact experiencing every possible facet of living – oblivious to the thousands of cars, bicycles and passers-by... It is this structure and scope of space that Husain has internalised, in which he feels at home and indeed which defines for him what home is.⁹⁶

As a progressive artist attempting to put forward Indian identity through modernism, he chose to absorb the feeling of the environment of the Indian street onto his canvas. The scenes of everyday life for an Indian would be perceived as hectic and frenzied to a westerner, and even Herwitz calls it overwhelming. For Husain, the idea is that as his life is crowded and "overwhelming," his paintings should be as well, to create accurate reflections of Indian society. Of course, the act of viewing a painting is one which is usually done in a calm environment, but it appears that Husain wishes to attach the hecticness of his everyday life to the tranquility usually associated with viewing art.

As his nickname "the Picasso of India" suggests, Husain greatly admired and heavily borrowed from the Spanish painter, stating simply that "Picasso created the language of modern

⁹⁶ Daniel Herwitz, "Maqbool Fida Husain, the Artist as India's National Hero" *Third Text* 20, no. 1 (January 2006), 49.

art.”⁹⁷ As Geeta Kapur points out, Husain was deeply influenced by *Guernica*, 1937, Picasso’s artistic response to the deadly bombings of the Spanish town that same year, and realized that through cubism, he, too, could create humanist and propagandist themes in his paintings.⁹⁸ The pensive *Man* embodies this humanistic idea which Husain has undertaken, while the iconographical motifs that surround him are the artist’s symbols of Indian nationalism. Perhaps the bull in *Man*, which is located on the left of the painting much like the bull in *Guernica*, is more than a reference to Shiva and Nandi or ceramic bulls at Mohenjo-Daro, but an allusion to Husain’s favorite work by the man who “created the language of modern art,” a reference which only viewers familiar with *Guernica* would understand. *Guernica*’s influence on Husain would continue throughout the artist’s life. Forty years later Husain would create an installation work titled *Theatre of the Absurd*, a testimony against the escalating violence in India. When asked why he chose to create an installation rather than paint, he replied, “What Picasso did in *Guernica* cannot be surpassed in painting. So I created an installation which engulfs you.”⁹⁹ Husain recognizes *Guernica* as the highest achievement in painting, especially as a response to violent events, and found that he would not be able to paint anything as meaningful as *Guernica* to portray the growing violence between Hindus and Muslims in the country.

Husain’s nickname, “the Picasso of India,” can be seen as both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, during his lifetime, perhaps being named the Picasso of India was a great honor, as Husain looked up to Picasso and was proud to say so. The name also probably helped popularize his work overseas, as western viewers were given a frame of reference. In the contemporary era, his nickname is still proudly exhibited in auction catalogs as a selling point. But naming India’s

⁹⁷ Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives*, 108.

⁹⁸ Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, 23.

⁹⁹ Dalmia, 120.

most successful artist the Indian Picasso has broader implications for modern Indian art history. Mitter analyzes the difficult situation modern Indian artists were placed in in regards to the art historical canon in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, writing,

In the colonial situation, if you imitate a style perfectly, you are really aping or mimicking a western form. But on the other hand, if you are unable to do that, you become second-rate, an ersatz artist or, let's say, a Picasso *manqué*... Because cubism was regarded as the product of European civilization, an Indian artist who engaged with it was immediately locked into the interdependent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.¹⁰⁰

Husain was not necessarily regarded as a Picasso *manqué*, but he was never able to shake the reference. As Mitter suggests, as Husain engaged with cubism, he became locked into a relationship between European master and Indian imitator. But there is so much more to Husain's work other than the fact that he was influenced by Picasso. Many famous artists from the modern period all over the world were inspired by Picasso, but only the most prominent artists from the peripheries are remembered by their influence by Picasso or other acclaimed masters. Amrita Sher-Gil, the "Frida Kahlo of Indian art," Pestonji Bomabji, the "Indian Rembrandt," Bahman Mohasses, the "Persian Picasso," photographer Yau Leung, the "Bresson of Hong Kong," Zhang Da Qian was dubbed the "Chinese Picasso" by the BBC, and I'm sure the list goes on. Geeta Kapur writes on a similar matter in her essay "When Was Modernism in Indian Art?," she argues that Indian modernity, in all forms—not just art, has been defined by western forces, writing,

¹⁰⁰ Mitter, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 28.

[Before] the west periodizes the postmodern entirely in its own terms and in that process also characterizes it, we have to introduce from the vantagepoint of the periphery the transgressions of uncategorized practice. We should reperiodize the modern in terms of our own historical experience of modernization and mark our modernisms so that we may enter the postmodern at least potentially on our own terms.¹⁰¹

The west only sees what happens in India in terms of the west, thus it has prioritized its influence in the nation's process of modernization. Kapur believes that Indians should reconsider how modernism has been characterized, and redefine it in their own way, to make sure they have control of how India's postmodern period is defined. In regards to art history, this has been happening: one of the first major books on Husain was published by Abrams in 1971, written by Richard Bartholomew and Shiv S. Kapur. On Husain and this early book, Khullar writes,

In the 1950s and 1960s, Husain offered a postcolonial critique of originality and mastery through a serious and sustained engagement with nonmodernist modes and forms derived from South Asian public culture. This critique was overlooked by critics who tended to see the artist as an unreconstructed modernist in the mold of Picasso or Klee, an Indian inheritor of a tradition of visual representation originating in Europe. That was the view of Richard Bartholomew and Shiv S. Kapur, the authors of the Abrams volume.¹⁰²

Bartholomew and S. Kapur were both Indian critics who failed to interpret Husain's body of work in a postcolonial setting. Rather they understood his paintings as an Indian attempt at the European modernist masters. In the last few decades, the work of Husain and the Bombay Progressives have been reanalyzed and recharacterized by many contemporary Indian critics and historians to include them into a postcolonial narrative, not just the narrative that western imperial forces had set up.

¹⁰¹ Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (Tulika, 2007), 297–98.

¹⁰² Khullar, 90–91.

Though India was founded on the principles of secular values, unfortunately such secular values did not stick around for too long. Husain was proud of his secular beliefs, and like the Mughals before him, he saw Hindu traditions and cultures as part of the Indian world he belonged to. He began painting Hindu gods and goddesses which resulted in many attacks against Husain by the Hindu right, in the mid-1990s. In 1996, *Vichar Mimansa*, a right-wing Hindi magazine, published an essay titled “Yah chitrakar hai ya Kasai? (Is he an artist or a butcher?)”, which reproduced a drawing of the Hindu goddess Saraswati that Husain made in the 1970s (fig. 35).¹⁰³ The drawing depicts the goddess in the nude, and the author of the article viewed the drawing as a grossly disrespectful act. Shortly after the article’s publication, the Mumbai police filed charges against Husain, and a militant Hindutva group vandalized an exhibition of his paintings in Ahmedabad.¹⁰⁴ In the years following, there were many more cases of vandalization of and attacks on Husain’s art, both nationally and abroad. In 2005, he painted *Bharat Mata* (fig. 36), a representation of Mother India as a nude woman. The painting sparked even more outrage from the Hindu right and threats on his life were made, leading him to leave India in a self-imposed exile that year. He gave up his Indian citizenship in 2010 and became a citizen of Qatar. He died in 2011 at the age of 95.

To attack an artist for depicting Hindu deities in the nude is ridiculous, as India has such a rich artistic culture and many of the oldest traditions of Hindu art depict nude deities. Many historic Hindu temples that members of the Hindu right have surely visited are full of erotic imagery that would have been called obscene if painted by Husain. It is only because of Husain’s

¹⁰³ Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Barefoot Across the Nation: M F Husain and the Idea of India*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Muslim heritage that the Hindu right got so violently upset. Hindu nationalists believe that India is for Hindus and that Indian culture has been damaged by other religions and cultures that have left their mark within the nation. But the founders of independent India, Nehru and Gandhi, explicitly declared that India should be a secular nation. Perhaps no other Indian artist has embodied secular values as Husain did. Despite his background, he saw the traditions of all religions in India as part of his identity as an Indian.¹⁰⁵ He loved and valued all aspects of Indian culture and wished to embrace them as his own. But unfortunately, it was Husain's love for India which led him into exile.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 13.

Conclusion: New Boundaries

When I began research for this project, my knowledge of Indian modern art was horribly slim. I had known of Husain because of the drawing I have, but the beauty and passion in his art and that of his contemporaries was not something that I was aware of. I had no idea how involved my process of creating this project would be, as every day of research meant being moved by something new, whether it be an artist's story or an individual work of art. I'm ashamed of my previous ignorance towards the Indian arts, as I have now realized that modern India is home to some of the most beautiful and fascinating art in the world. Though my paper thus far has underlined the intersectionality of religion and class within an artistic community, the Indian art scene in the 1940s-1960s was overwhelmingly male and straight, and although the demographic of straight Indian men make up the majority of the nation's art history, I would hate to give the impression that that is all the world of Indian art has to offer. The Progressive Artists group set the scene for modern art in India, and many progressive artists or groups of artists in India followed in their footsteps. Throughout my research, I learned of so many interesting artists whose work I adored but did not directly connect to the overarching theme of my project, other than that they were modern Indian artists. That being said, I'd like to use the end of this project to highlight a few key artists who entered the spotlight in the wake of the Progressive Artists Group who pushed boundaries and do not fit the mold of the straight male artist that has prevailed in my project up until now.

Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2003) never had any formal artistic training and did not gain much recognition for his art until relatively late in his life. He joined the Baroda Group, a group

of modern figurative artists based out of the faculty of the fine arts division of the University of Baroda. He shared an apartment with a British artist in the early 1960s who introduced him to British Pop Art.¹⁰⁶ Khakhar took great interest in the works of David Hockney and his influence can be seen in Khakhar's choice of color and the way he renders his subjects. Similarly to the Progressive Artists before him, Khakhar combines the influence of a western artist with the world around him. Many of his earlier paintings revolve around mundane aspects of middle-class life in India, such as *De-Lux Tailors*, 1972 (fig. 37), where the blue floor and pink walls are reminiscent of Hockney's *A Bigger Splash*, 1967. Men are the primary subjects in a lot of his paintings, but it was not until 1981 that Khakhar exhibited his "coming out" painting, *You Can't Please All* (fig. 38).¹⁰⁷ The painting depicts the naked artist upon his balcony watching one of Aesop's famous fables unfold before his eyes in a continuous narrative. In the fable, a father and his son take their donkey to the market. When the son is riding the Donkey, they get stopped and told that the son should respect his older father and let him ride. When the father rides, they get stopped and told that the father should not make his poor son walk. When they both ride, they get stopped and told that they should not put all their weight on the poor donkey, and so on. Thus by trying to please everybody, the father pleases nobody. *You Can't Please All* is a reflection of Khakhar's struggle to accept his own sexual identity and marks the beginning of a period where Khakhar would begin to openly explore his sexuality in his art.¹⁰⁸ *My Dear Friend*, 1983 (fig. 39) depicts the artist embracing his lover in the comfort of a bed while people outside go about their lives, a deeply personal view into the artist's life.

¹⁰⁶ "Five Ways to Look at Bhupen Khakhar" (Tate, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Karin Zitzewitz, *Midnight to the Boom: Painting in India After Independence: From the Peabody Essex Museum's Herwitz Collection* (Peabody Essex Museum, 2013), 154.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Arpita Singh's (b. 1937) dream-like paintings fuse the folk and the surreal. Born in West Bengal, she cycled through various techniques such as figurative watercolors and black and white abstractions, before the late 1980s where she found her style by taking influence from Bengali folk art.¹⁰⁹ She utilizes a bright color palette and the central figures in her paintings are usually women. Her paintings are narrative-based, but deciphering her narratives is not always a simple task. She fills her canvases with elements from various aspects of life, juxtaposing nature, tasks of everyday life, industrial vehicles, and sometimes weapons. *Women with Boats and Ducks*, 1986 (fig. 40) is a surreal display of objects and people from multiple perspectives. A body of water contains steamships, ducks, and people, though rendered in unnaturalistic fashions. All of the figures are depicted as busts, except for the large central figure who appears as an angel in a white robe, floating in the water. The viewer looks out at the body of water from a bed of flowers with two men, a duck, and a chair. The family and home are incredibly important aspects of Singh's West Bengali culture and upbringing, and many of her paintings depict her family and neighbors.¹¹⁰ *Munna Apa's Garden*, 1989 (fig. 41), depicts her neighbor's garden, again in a surrealist manner. It is unclear whether the scene is indoors or outdoors, as there is a woman watering plants, someone sleeping on the ground with a blanket, someone peeking behind curtains, indoor furniture, and cars and planes passing through, all in one scene. In the background, a woman breastfeeds by the window. The woman breastfeeding and the woman watering plants are significant as Singh often incorporates tasks assigned to women in her art. Singh creates a floral border to define the space, a tactic used in the popular folk embroidery art of Bengal, yet the framed space still remains difficult to interpret.

¹⁰⁹ Susan Bean, "Arpita Singh", *Midnight to the Boom: Painting in India After Independence*, 182.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Nasreen Mohamedi (1937-1990) was born in Karachi but moved to Bombay a few years before partition. Coming from a wealthy family, she studied at St. Martin's School of Art in London. She diverted from the colorful figurative paintings of India's traditional and modern art, and mainly worked with pencil and paper, creating a large series of minimalist abstract compositions. She considered the spiritual aspects of her work, exploring Zen philosophy and India's Tantric Buddhist and Hindu traditions.¹¹¹ *Untitled*, c. 1975 (fig. 42), plays with perspective and manipulates a 3D perspective. Grids and bold lines are the central aspects of her drawings and she also explored similar themes in her photography, though her photographs were never exhibited during her lifetime. *Untitled*, c. 1970s (fig. 43), depicts diagonal lines painted on a street. Though of course, she did not paint the lines on the street, she was able to see reflections of her work in real life. The positioning of the camera and the way the lines on the street recede back are reminiscent of the receding diagonal lines in her drawing *Untitled*, c. 1975. Unlike anything else created in her country, Nasreen Mohamedi's art marks an important shift in the broadening horizons of what is meant by Indian art.

Nalini Malani (b. 1946) was also born in Karachi, but she and her family moved to Kolkata shortly after partition before settling in Bombay. Another attendee of the J. J. School of Art, she received her diploma in 1969 before traveling to Paris to study art. Her early paintings are reflections of her status as a middle-class woman, painting her friends and family around her as showing signs of vulnerability and existential dread.¹¹² In the late 1980s, she traveled to the United States and saw a documentary on Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), where she connected the artist's life to the art and life of Amrita Sher-Gil. Both painters were of mixed heritage and relied

¹¹¹ Rebecca M. Brown, "Nasreen Mohamedi," *Midnight to the Boom: Painting in India After Independence*, 160.

¹¹² Susan Bean, "Nalini Malani," *Midnight to the Boom: Painting in India After Independence*, 206.

on indigenous life and folk art in their art, but Malani found Kahlo's relationship with the people of Mexico to be deeper than Sher-Gil's connection with the village people of India.¹¹³ In response, she painted *Old Arguments on Indigenism* (fig. 44) in 1989. Malani paints Kahlo and Sher-Gil next to each other, with a smaller, injured Kahlo in her own lap, and a temple sculpture and village child in Sher-Gil's lap. Malani paints herself to the left, looking back at the two artists with a look of dread and surrounded by depictions of her own anxieties, perhaps of being a female artist from a third world country who is expected to continue certain aesthetic traditions.

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Malani's art moved away from painting in the early 2000s as she began focusing on installations. In works such as *Gamepieces*, 2003 (fig. 45), Malani paints onto mylar strips which she constructed into 6 rotating cylinders. She then projected found video footage onto the cylinders, which projected shadows of her painted figures onto the walls, interacting with the found footage. *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* (fig. 46), 2005, is a 5-channel video installation consisting of partition-era archival footage, edited to create a horrifying portrayal of Indian partition, its aftermath, and its effect on women. Born in Karachi the year before partition, Malani had an intensely personal relationship with the subject. As Nasreen Mohamedi did with her drawings, Nalini Malani's installations mark another shift in the broadening definitions of what is considered Indian art. Just half a century earlier, Peter Watson, an English collector, told Souza that his paintings were not "Indian art." Malani pushes the boundaries set by Mr. Watson and the imperialist psyche much further, challenging any confines of what Indian art can really mean.

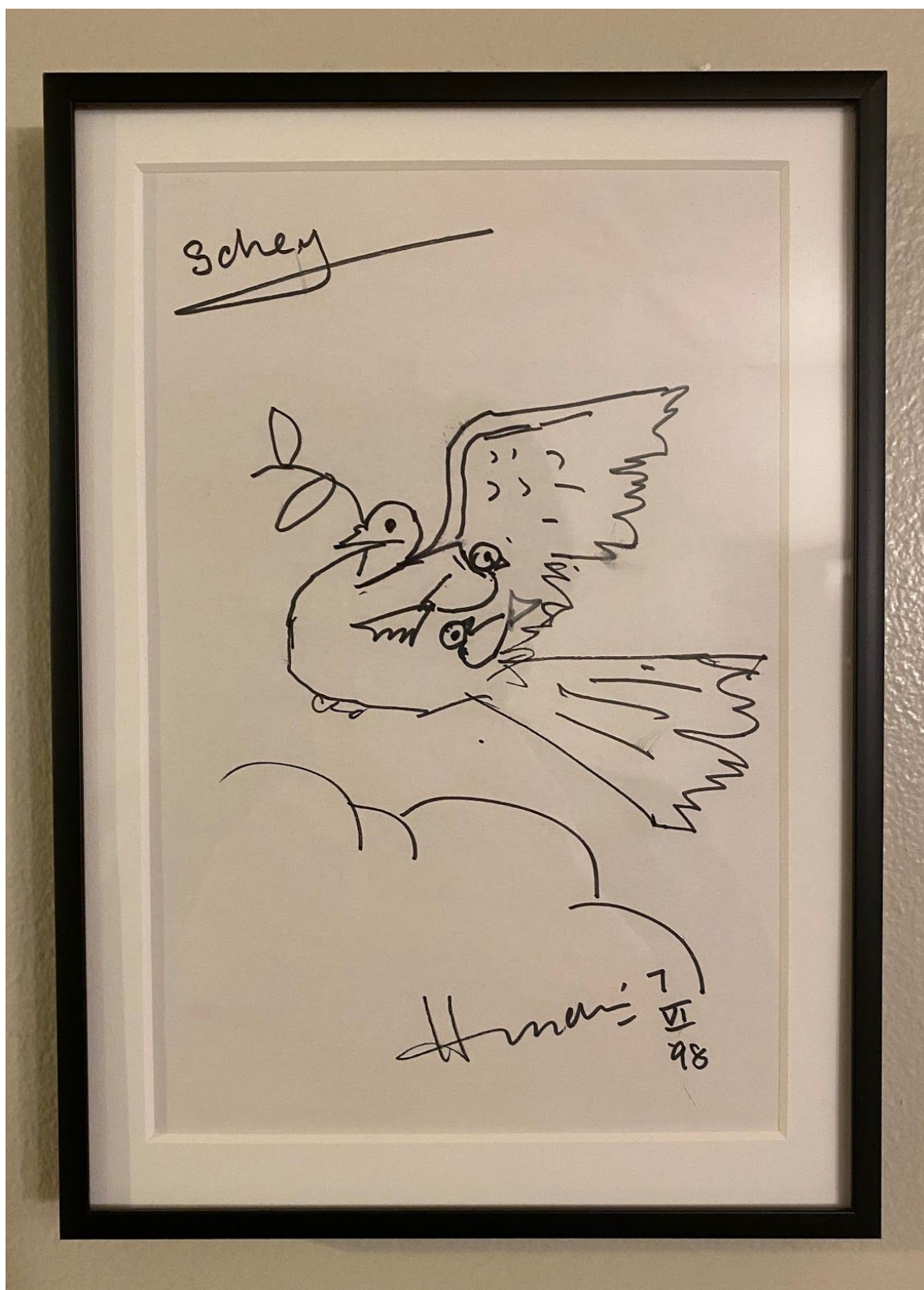
¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

The Progressive Artists Group opened the door for a secular movement of modern Indian art after independence. While many of the founding members left India and did not see their goals realized in the way they had hoped, lots of artists followed in their wake and provided India with a flourishing modern art scene. The conditions in which Souza and Husain left India are both rather tragic. It could be said that Souza abandoned the idea of India. At the time of his departure in 1949, India was still a newborn nation open to many paths and trajectories, and yet he felt that the Indian art world might not ever be ready to receive his art. He found a good deal of success in the 1950s and early 60s, becoming one of the many artists from the Commonwealth of Nations to challenge Britain's art scene and history, but upon returning to India briefly in 1960, the nation was still not able to offer him what he wanted, and he continued to disown its art and culture until he formally recognized India's thriving art scene in 1972. He struggled during the end of his career but refused to settle back in India until very shortly before his death. Though revered within India, his legacy was often overlooked and forgotten in the west. He passed away in 2002, but his obituary was not published in the New York Times until April 12th, 2020, as part of their "Overlooked No More" series of obituaries.

The more disturbing of the two departures was certainly Husain's. From the strong nationalism Husain displayed throughout his career, one would never have guessed that he would leave India. But it was not the artist who abandoned the nation, but the nation who abandoned the artist. No other Indian artist exhibited such pride for his or her country. Even during times of economic turmoil and political unrest, Husain painted what he saw to be the beauty of the nation: its people and its culture. But it was his belief in the ideas and values of a secular India, those consistent with the nation's founding, which led him into exile. Souza and Husain's departures

from India are separated by almost six decades, but both exhibit the difficulties of being a secular public figure, especially one of a non-Hindu descent—either the frustrations cause you to give up on the nation, or the nation turns on you. A rather pessimistic end to this project, but one can only hope for the mainstream to turn towards a secular form of nationalism, but given the current political situation, there is a long road ahead.



1. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Untitled (Schey)*, 1998, ink on paper, Shay Kothari, New York.



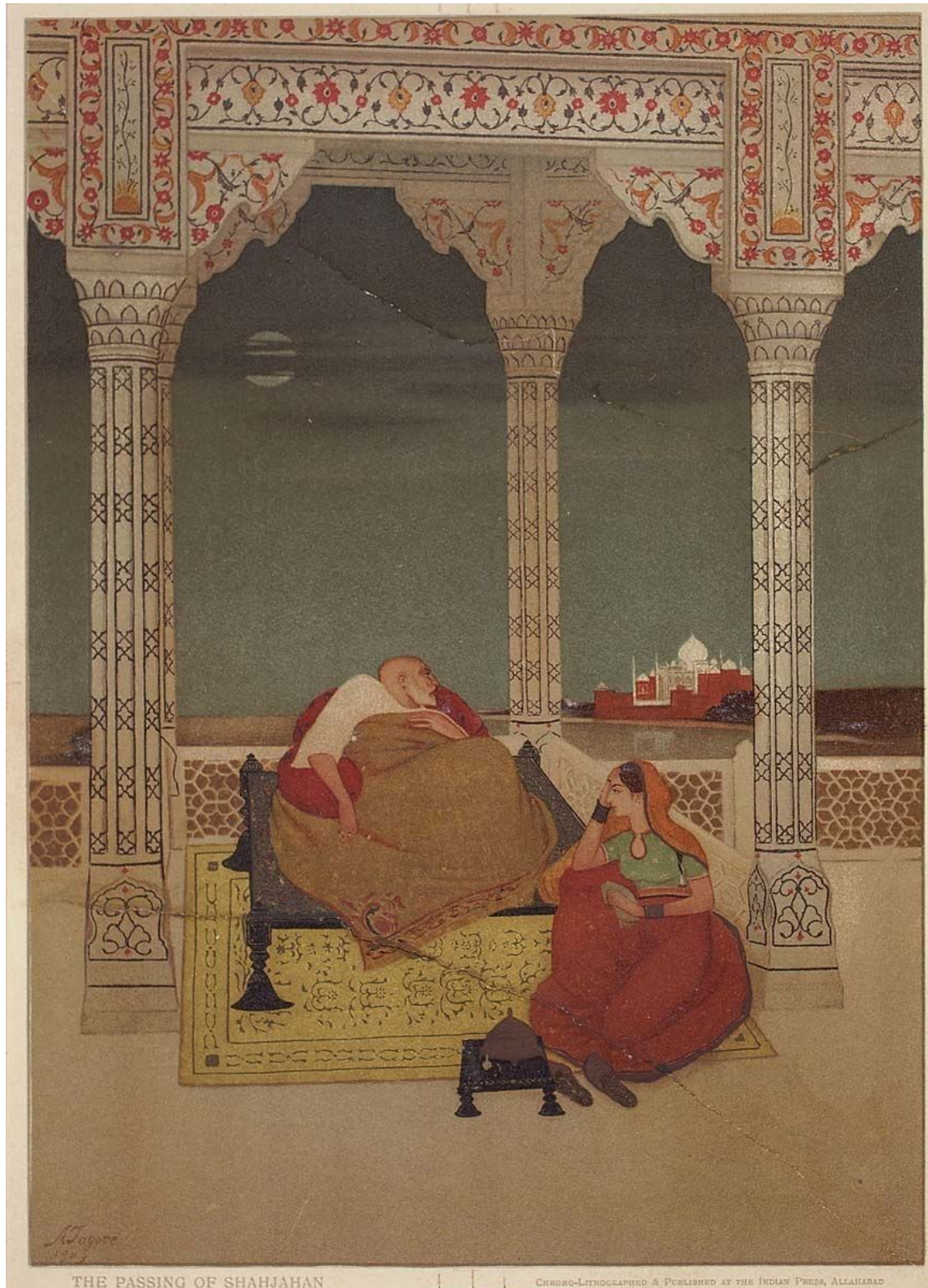
2. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Signature (Pervin)*, 1997, ink on paper, Pervin Kothari, Mumbai.



3. Pestonji Bomanji, *Self Portrait*, 1914, oil on board, 19 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches, Pundole's Mumbai, The Fine and Decorative Arts Sale (M0008), August 26, 2014.



4. Raja Ravi Varma, *Radha in the Moonlight*, 1890, oil on canvas, 57.5 x 41.5 inches, Pundole's Mumbai, The Fine Art Sale (M0015), November 17, 2016.



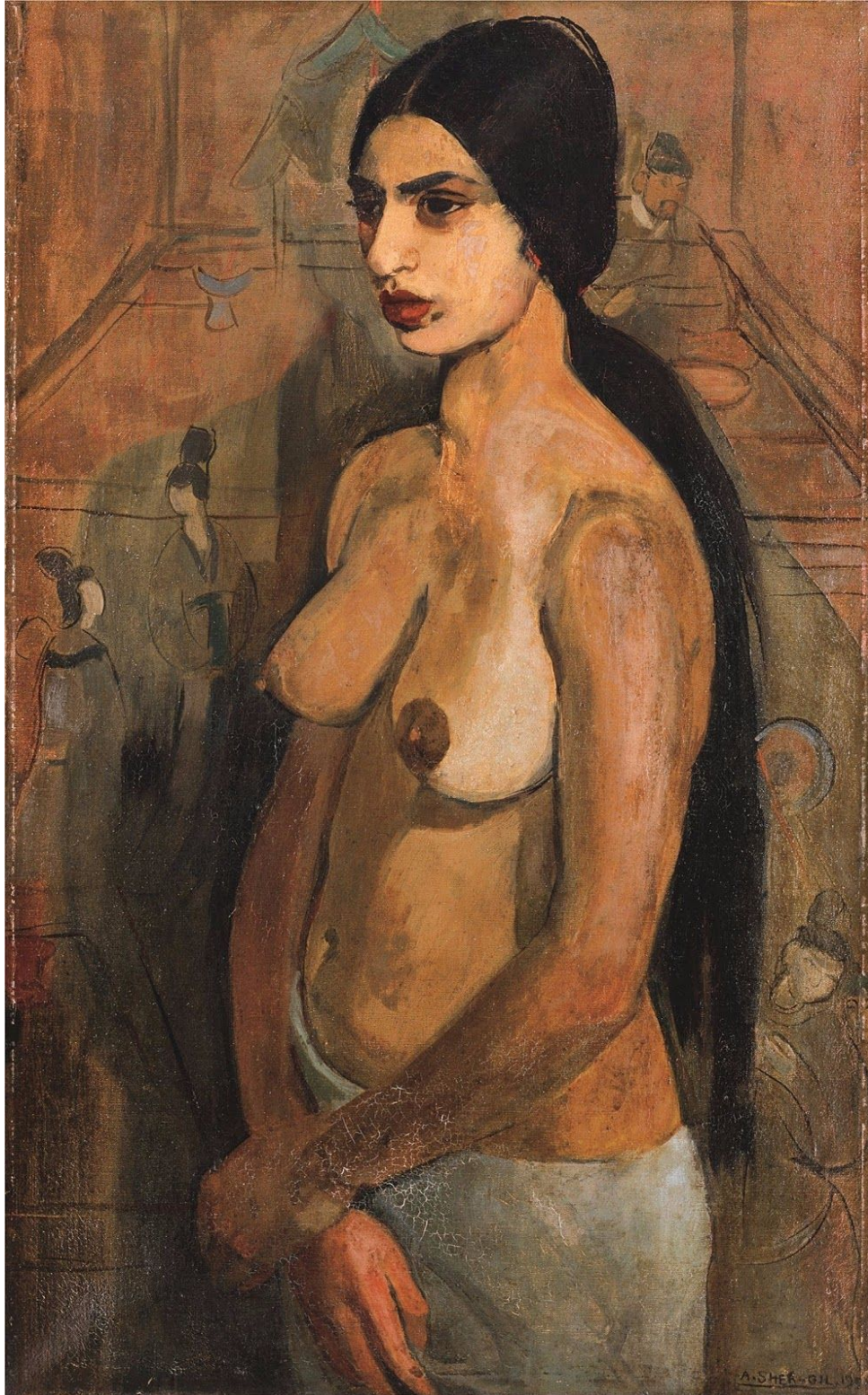
5. Abanindranath Tagore, *The Passing of Shah Jahan*, 1902, oil on board, 14 x 10 inches, Victoria Memorial, Kolkata.



6. Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1905, watercolor on paper, 10.5 x 6 inches, Victoria Memorial, Kolkata.



7. Sunayani Devi, *Untitled (Krishna)*, c. 1920s, watercolour and pencil on paper, 9 7/8 x 7 inches, Christie's London, South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art (sale 15503), June 12, 2018.



8. Amrita Sher-Gil, Self-Portrait as Tahitian, 1934, oil on canvas, collection of Navina and Vivan Sundaram.



9. Amrita Sher-Gil, *Three Girls*, 1935, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.



10. Amrita Sher-Gil, *Boys with Lemons*, 1935, oil on canvas, 36 x 22 inches, Saffronart Mumbai, Spring Live Auction, March 5, 2020.



11. Jamini Roy, *A Woman*, c. 1940s.



12. Jamini Roy, *Mother and Child*, c. 1960s.



13. Progressive Artists Group, Bombay, 1949

First row (left to right): F. N. Souza, K. H. Ara, H. A. Gade

Second row (left to right): M. F. Husain, S. K. Bakre, S. H. Raza



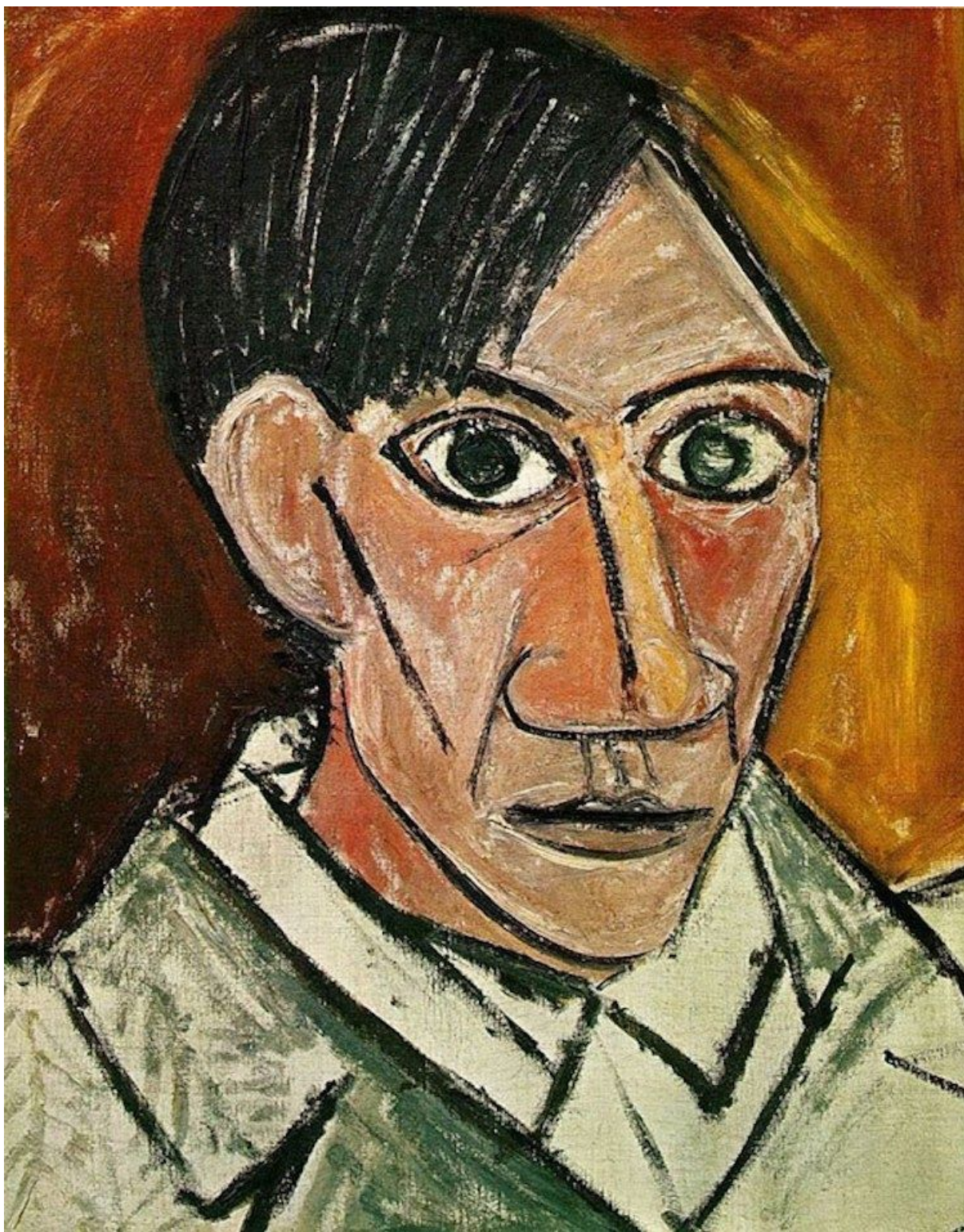
14. Francis Newton Souza, *Beggars in Bombay*, 1944, gouache on paper, 22 x 14 7/8 inches, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi.



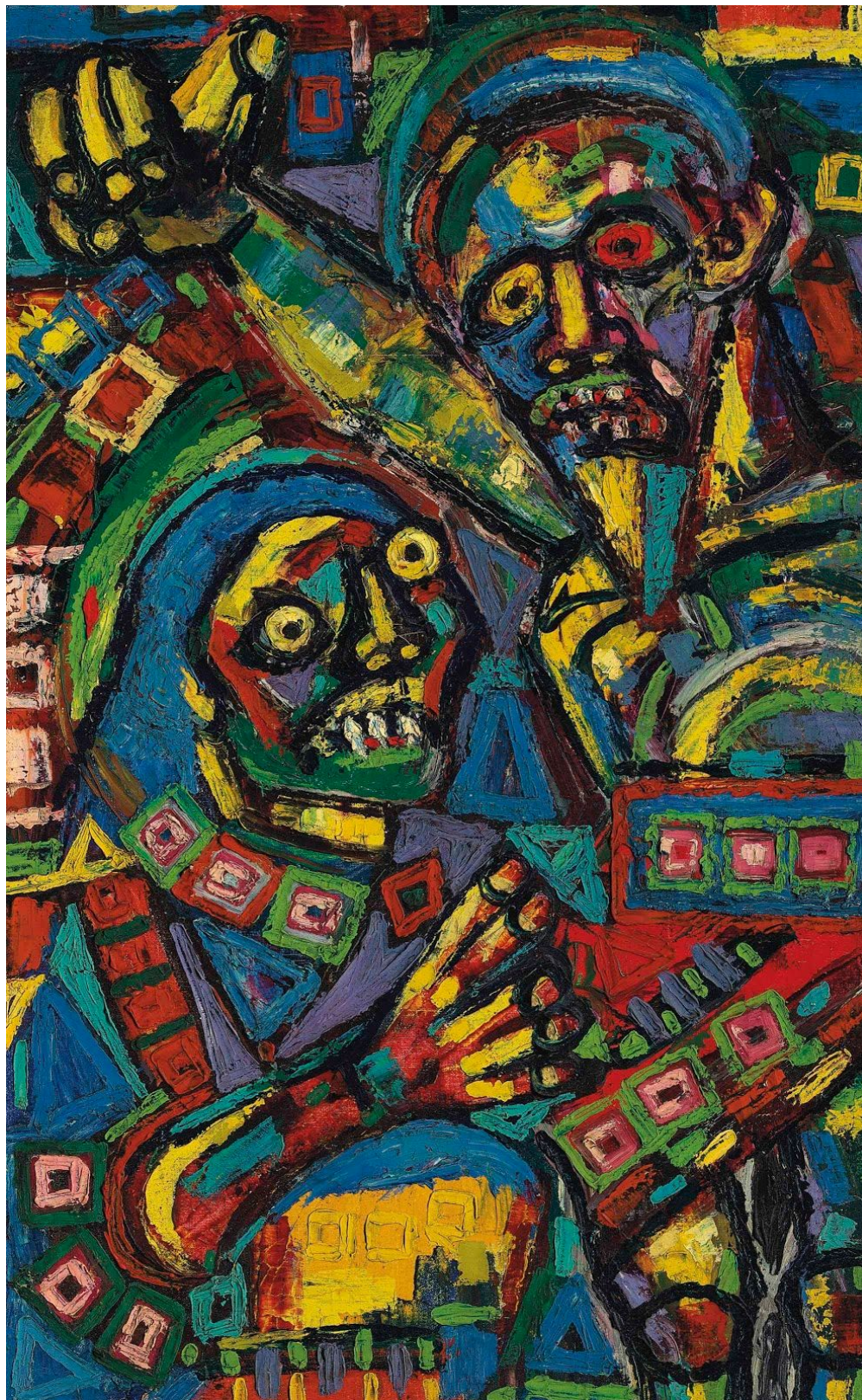
15. Francis Newton Souza, *The Family*, 1946, oil on card laid on board, 27 x 40 inches.



16. Francis Newton Souza, *The Family*, 1947, oil on board, 47 1/8 x 46 1/8 inches, Christie's Mumbai, The India Sale (sale 1202), December 11, 2014.



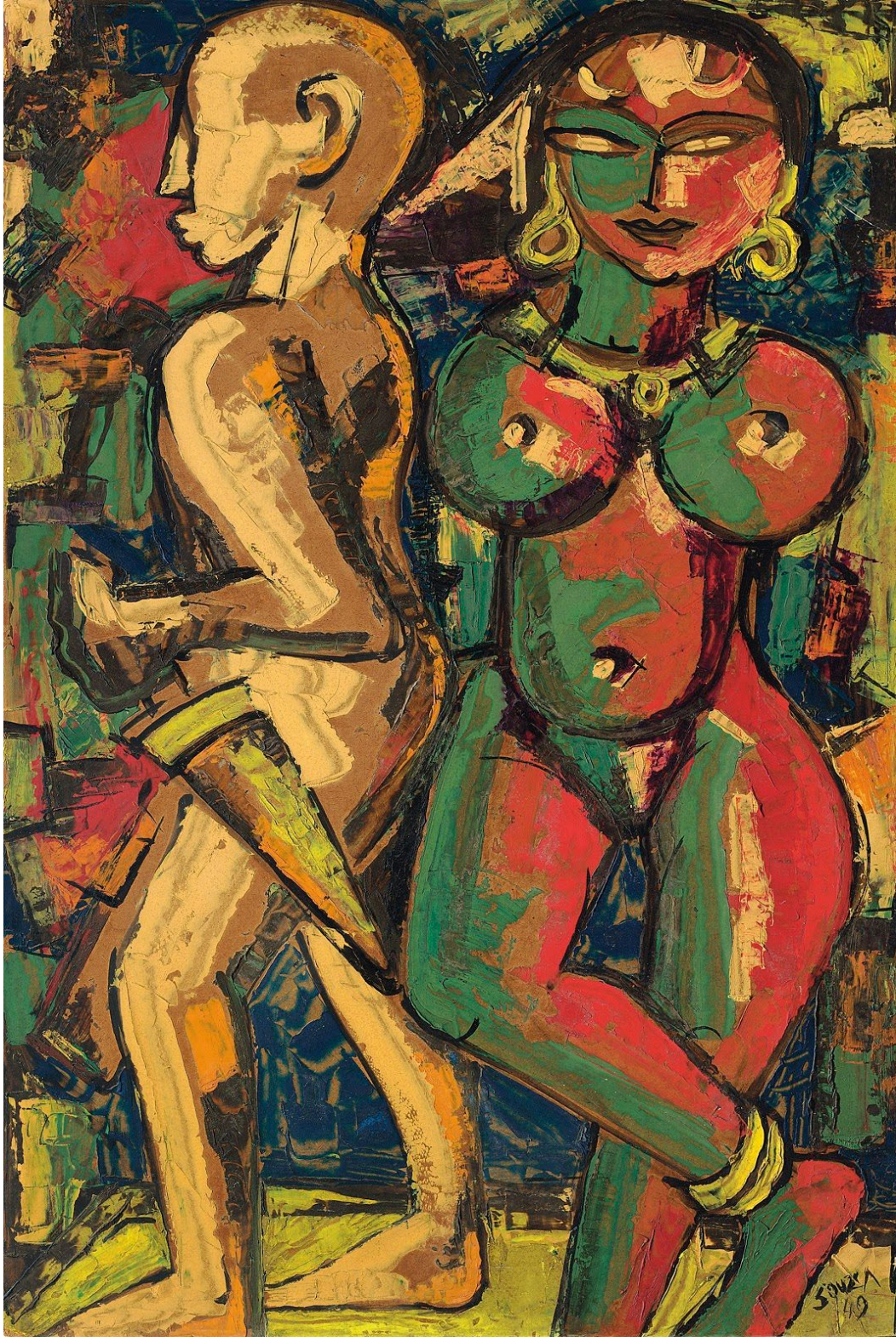
17. Pablo Picasso, *Self Portrait*, 1907, oil on canvas.



18. Francis Newton Souza, *Pietà*, 1947, oil on canvas, 39 x 23 inches.



19. Francis Newton Souza, *Self-Portrait*, 1949, oil on board, Aicon Gallery, New York.



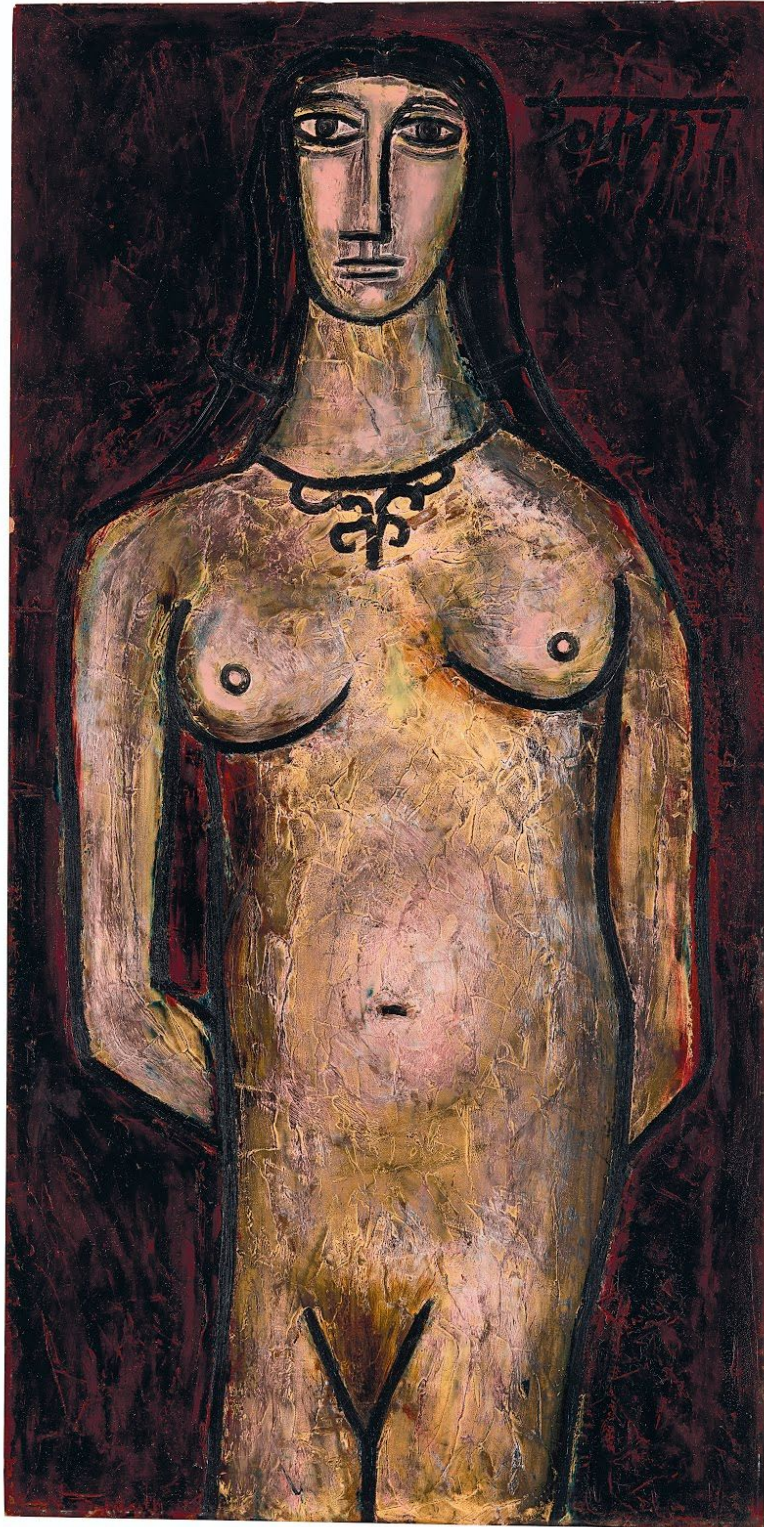
20. Francis Newton Souza, *The Jealous Lover*, 1949, oil on board, 36 x 24 inches, Christie's New York, South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art (sale 16048), September 12, 2018.



21. Khajuraho Temple detail, c. 950-1050 CE, sandstone, Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh.



22. Francis Newton Souza, *Indian Scene*, oil on canvas, 40 x 35 inches.



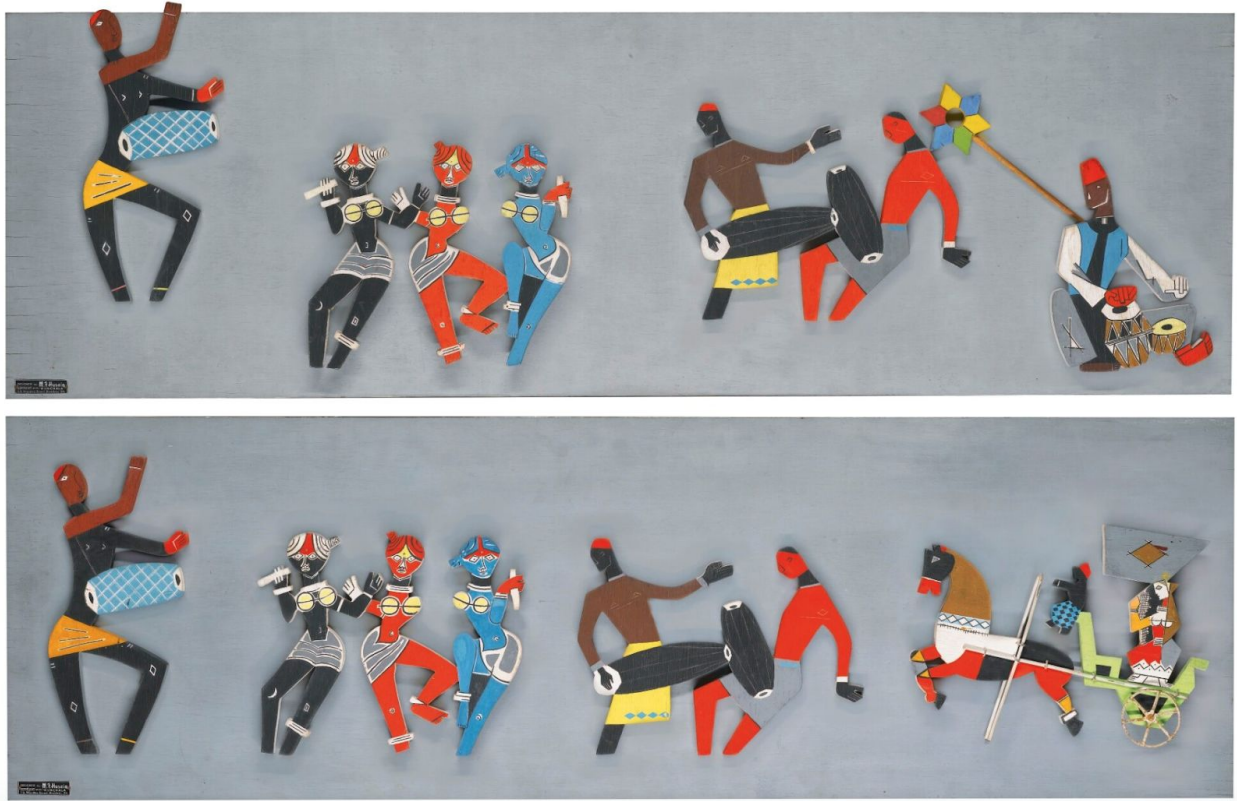
23. Francis Newton Souza, *Standing Nude*, 1957, oil on board, 48 x 24 inches, Sotheby's New York, Modern & Contemporary South Asian Art, March 15, 2016.



24. Francis Newton Souza, *Jesting Pilate*, 1956, oil on board, 48 x 36 inches, Christie's New York, South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art (sale 16048), September 12, 2018.



25. Francis Newton Souza, *Head of a Woman*, 1956, oil on board, 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 28 inches, Christie's New York, South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art (sale 17597), September 11, 2019.



26. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Two Painted Relief Panels Mounted with Toys*, oil on wood panel, 48 by 15 ¼ inches each, Sotheby's London, Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art (sale L14500), October 7, 2014.



27. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Holi*, 1951, oil on canvas, 27 1/8 x 32 5/8 inches, Ashish and Reshma Jain, New Delhi.



28. Anonymous (Mughal), *Holi Festival*, 1770-85.



29. Devidasa of Nurpur, *Shiva and Parvati Playing Chaupar*, 1694-95, opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper, 8 x 12 1/4 inches, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



30. Anonymous (Basohli), *Siddhalakshmi and Kali*, c. 1660-1670, opaque watercolor, gold, silver, and beetle wing cases on paper, 8 5/8 x 8 3/8 inches.



31. Anonymous (Basohli), *Gita Govinda*, 1730.



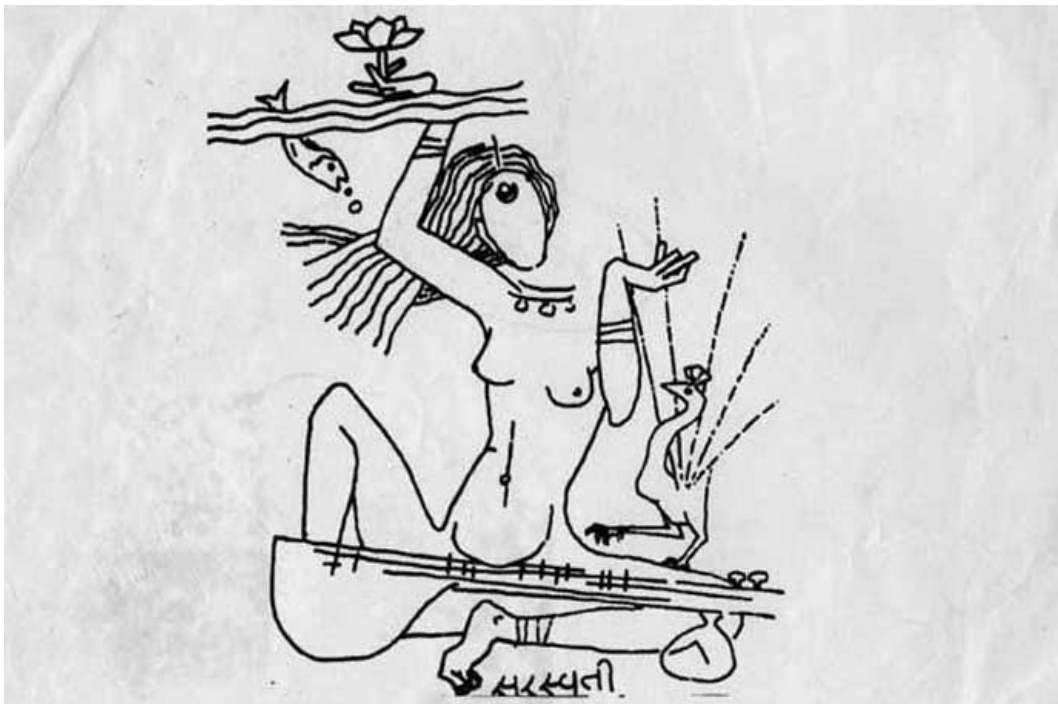
32. Anonymous, *Sanchi Yakshi Figure*, c. 1st century CE, British Museum, London.



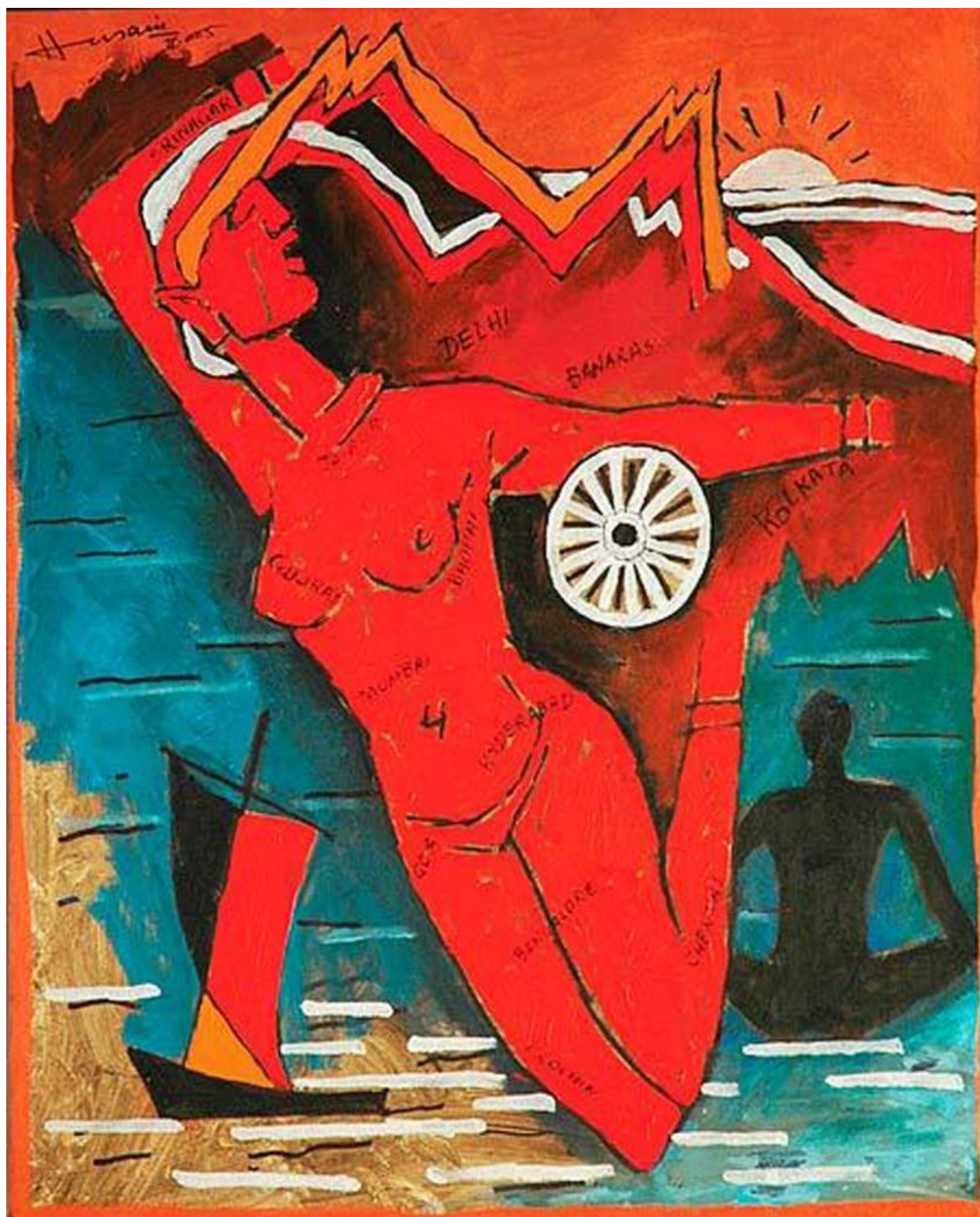
33. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Peasant Couple*, 1950, oil on canvas, 47 1/2 × 36 1/2 inches, Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts.



34. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Man*, 1950, oil on fiberwood, 48 x 96 inches, Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts.



35. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Untitled (Saraswati)*, 1970, ink on paper.



36. Maqbool Fida Husain, *Untitled (Bharat Mata)*, 2005, acrylic on canvas, 41.5 x 33.5 inches.



37. Bhupen Khakur, *De-Lux Tailors*, 1972, oil on canvas, 42 x 33 inches, Sotheby's London, Howard Hodgkin: Portrait of the Artist (sale L17120), October 24, 2017.



38. Bhupen Khakur, *You Can't Please All*, 1981, oil on canvas, 69 x 69 inches, Tate Collection, London.



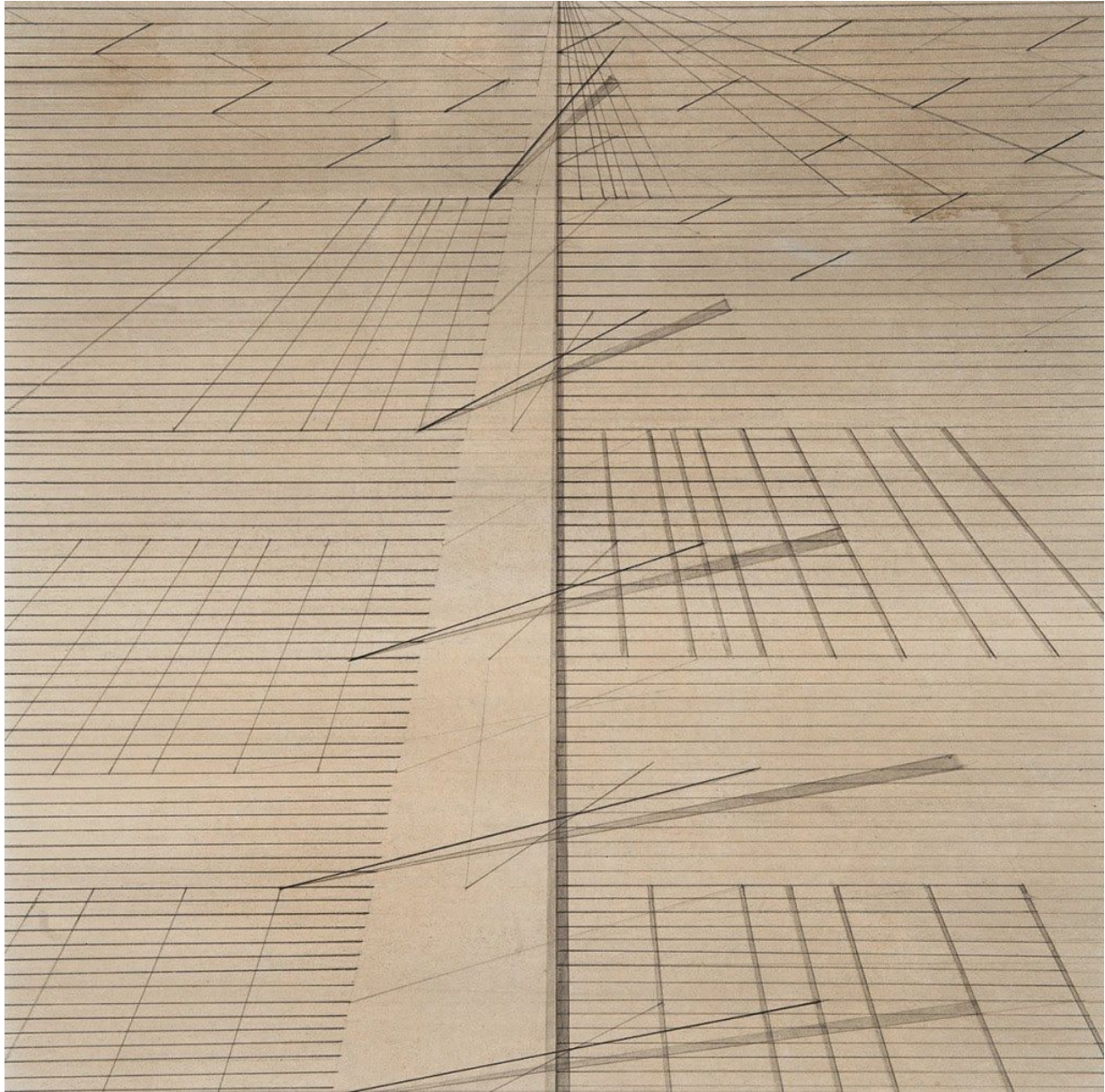
39. Bhupen Khakur, *My Dear Friend*, 1983, oil on canvas, 44 x 44 inches.



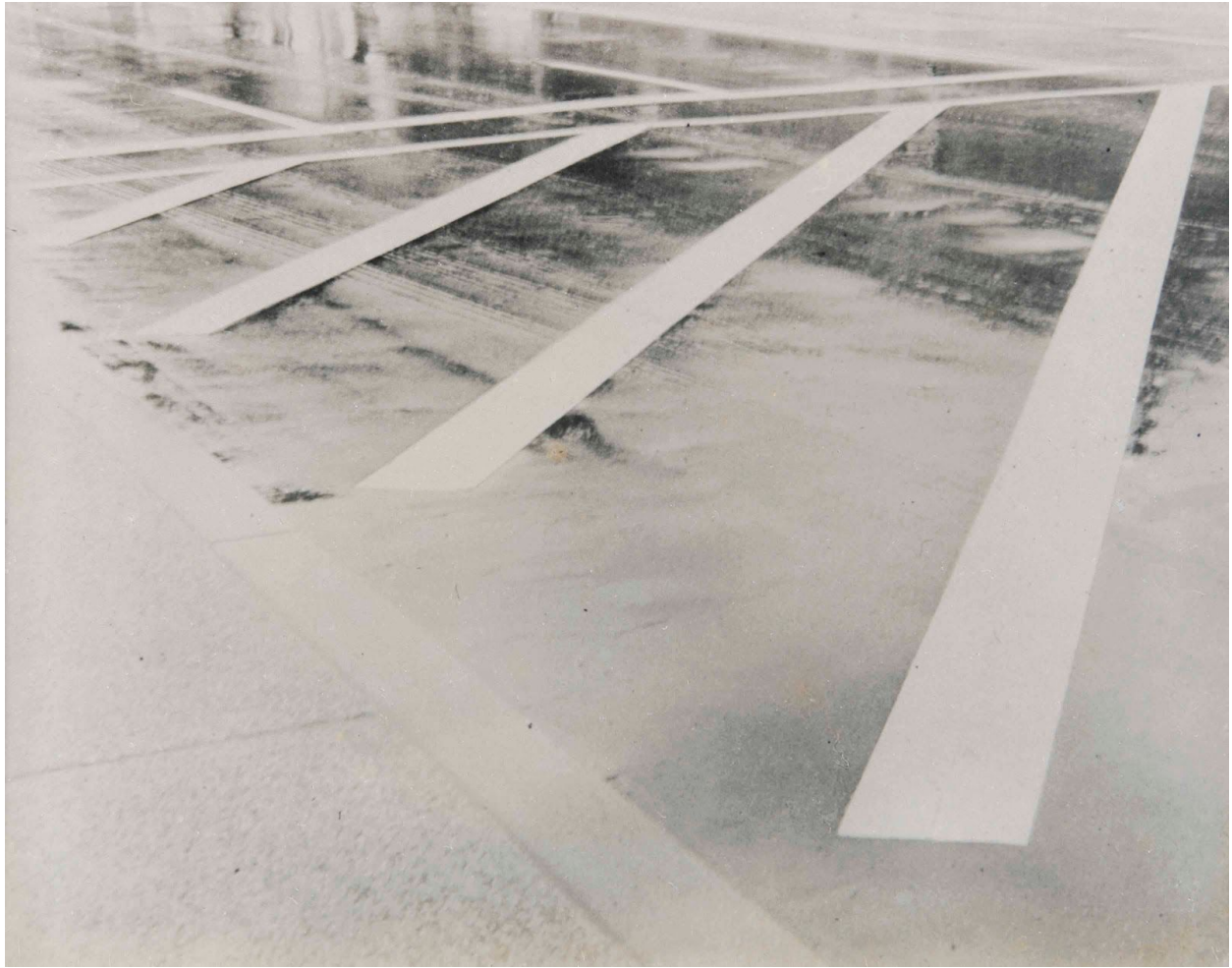
40. Arpita Singh, *Women with Boats and Ducks*, 1986, oil on canvas, 48 x 47 7/8 inches, Christie's Mumbai, South Asian Art (sale 1201), December 19, 2013.



41. Arpita Singh, *Munna Apa's Garden*, 1989, oil on canvas, 62 1/4 x 68 1/4 inches, collection of Dara Mehta, Mumbai.



42. Nasreen Mohamedi, *Untitled*, c. 1975, ink and graphite on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



43. Nasreen Mohamedi, *Untitled*, c. 1970s (printed 1990s), photographic print on paper, 9¾ x 12 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



44. Nalini Malani, *Old Arguments on Indigenism*, 1989, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches, Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts.



48. Nalini Malani, *Gamepieces*, 2003, Four-channel video/shadow play (color, sound: 12 min) and synthetic polymer paint on six Lexan cylinders, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



49. Nalini Malani, *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain*, 2005, Five-channel video (color, sound), Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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